

MANY-SIDED LIVES: LIBERAL JUDGMENT AND THE
REALIST NOVEL

by

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Abstract

Many-Sided Lives argues that nineteenth-century novels by Jane Austen, George Eliot and others train readers in the liberal habit of appreciating thoughtful opposition. Through the systematic juxtaposition of characters who express conflicting attitudes, such novels invite readers to adopt the stance J.S. Mill describes as “many-sidedness.” While recent scholarship has brought welcome attention to exemplary characters in realist fiction who display liberal habits of mind—including disinterestedness and critical distance—this work has said little about the formal techniques used to cultivate such habits. *Many-Sided Lives* by contrast, argues that formal features of the Victorian novel—and especially its ample character-system—was essential to its promotion of liberal thought. Building on Alex Woloch’s study of major and minor characters in realism, *Many-Sided Lives* examines Victorian novels that use secondary characters as dialectical interlocutors for protagonists. Four chapters examine conflicting expressions of sincere and theatrical communication in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*; spontaneous and disciplined responses to moral life in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*; committed and ironic relations to society in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*; and imaginative and rational judgments of behavior in Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*. Among the surprising conclusions I draw from my close reading of these texts is that the realist novel promotes a distinct sort of liberalism, defined less by its inclusive representation of social voices than by its comparative assessment of their merits. The liberalism of the Victorian novel was at once brave and unorthodox, inviting readers to embrace the challenge of understanding opposing views.

Acknowledgments

To my antagonists, Patrick Fessenbecker and Grant Shreve.

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Introduction: Liberal Reading and the Aesthetic

*If literary criticism is ever to conceptualize a new disciplinary domain, it will have to undertake first a much more thorough reflection on the historical category of literature; otherwise I suggest that new critical movements will continue to register their agendas symptomatically, by ritually overthrowing a continually resurgent literariness and literary canon. -John Guillory, *Cultural Capital**

I. Victorian Liberalism: Moral Intelligence and Literary Study

In mid-19th century England, the citizens of the world's most powerful democracy and imperial power struggled to find common ground over polarizing issues. The influence of Puritanism and the emergence of partisan presses enhanced English tendencies to adopt convictions that were sincere but also self-righteous.¹ Public life had become a tribal affair as citizens formed rigid opinions in lockstep with powerful institutions: scientific and religious, Tory and democrat, Tractarian and Catholic.

To alleviate this groupthink, Victorian liberals thought that citizens needed to become morally intelligent: or, thoughtful about their own convictions and charitable to the convictions of others.² J.S. Mill's word for moral intelligence was many-sidedness, and he adopted the concept from Aristotle's conception of practical reason.³ In Aristotle's model of reasoning, disputes occur due to the partial knowledge of individual

¹ For a discussion of rigidity and partisanship in Victorian culture see Houghton 161-76.

² I adopt the term "moral intelligence" from Lionel Trilling.

³ Mill's 1840 essay on Coleridge criticizes "the noisy conflict of half-truths, angrily denying one another," and argues that "in almost every one of the leading controversies, past or present, in social philosophy, both sides were in the right in what they affirmed, though wrong in what they denied; and that if either could have been made to take the other's views in addition to its own, little more would have been needed to make its doctrine correct" (qtd in Houghton 178). Houghton suggests that the intellectual lineage of Mill's interest in Aristotle's dialectical conception of practical reason owes primarily to his reading of Coleridge, who had acquired the concept from German philosophy, especially Hegel, who had in turn acquired it from Aristotle (178). Mill was also familiar with the work of Goethe and of Carlyle, which had also been influenced by Hegel.

perspectives. While an individual alone perceives “little or nothing” of the truth, he may nevertheless validate his view through its capacity to account for the views that oppose it (Aristotle, qtd in McCumber 164). The full truth only emerges from a “clash of standpoints,” in which conflicting opinions are harmonized as far as this is possible (McCumber 164). Because individual knowledge is always partial, this dialectical model of reason not only requires individuals to be informed about the content of competing viewpoints but willing to accommodate them in their own view. Mill describes the process of this kind of practical reasoning in “On Liberty”: “In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism on his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him ...hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind” (39). For Aristotle as well as Mill, sound practical judgment requires interlocutors to adopt an accommodating approach to discussion: competing and superficial views are not errors to be overthrown, but necessary to deepen one’s own partial or superficial understanding. The judgments of the kind of morally intelligent citizen Mill describes would not be one-sided but many-sided: or accommodating, informed, and impartial in their approach to competing views.

But how could citizens acquire a taste for morally intelligent judgment and perception? Matthew Arnold suggested that reading literature could help citizens practice accommodating different viewpoints. If citizens studied “the best which has been thought and said,” they could free themselves from blind reliance on the “watchwords and ready-made judgments” of competing social factions (*Culture and Anarchy* 5, 52). By reading

great works of literature in the right way, John Ruskin argued, these citizens would develop powers of sensitivity, curiosity, and humility.⁴ This reading practice, in turn, could be applied to life in civil society, as citizens trained in the habits of charitable reading could more easily see the appeal of each other's ideas. In the process of becoming skilled readers of literature, citizens would learn to relish the challenge of understanding opposing views.

II. Leavisism and New Criticism: Liberal Reading

The liberal ideal of literary education that Arnold envisioned would be most fully realized in the middle years of the 20th century. As Leavisism gained traction in England and the New Criticism in America, English departments trained students in habits of reading designed to cultivate moral intelligence. The influence of T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards on both these schools created a common focus on the practice of reading as the cultivation of judgment. To read and reflect on literature, in T.S. Eliot's words, was to "compose ...differences with as many of [one's] fellows as possible in the common pursuit of true judgment" ("The Function of Criticism" 69). For I.A. Richards as well, the discipline of close-reading was designed help individuals acquire powers of perception necessary for morally intelligent judgment in society: or the capacity to stand back from "views that seem to conflict with our own prepossessions ...to investigate them" rather than seeking to "refute" or "combat" them (*Practical Criticism* 7).

Richards's *Practical Criticism* lays out requirements for the kind of cultivated reading practice he imagined. Three were especially relevant to the liberal conception of

⁴ See Ruskin's "Of King's Treasures" in *Sesame and Lilies*. David Wayne Thomas precedes me in connecting the ethos of Ruskin's prose to the many-sided habits of evaluation championed by mid-Victorian liberals.

reading inherited from Arnold and Ruskin. First, close-reading requires sensitivity rather than “inhibition,” or what Richards relates to “hardness of heart” (14). That is to say, successful reading depends foremost on an ability to respond, to have one’s feelings played upon by the object of inquiry. Second, successful reading depends upon curiosity rather than close-mindedness: it requires enough cognitive flexibility to make out “complex and unfamiliar meanings” made present in the text (295). This work of “making out the plain sense” quickly misfires if uncurious readers fail to attend to what the poem is actually doing, and instead respond with “stock responses,” or “views ...already fully prepared in the reader’s mind” (12, 14). Third, the practice of reading requires humility rather than “narcissism” or complacency. Richards discerns this kind of failure in one student’s surprisingly candid response to a Longfellow poem that mentions “Christian charity”—a subject the student deemed to be “not worth much effort on the part of the reader because the underlying emotion is not of sufficient value” (15, 160).

The skills of sensitivity, curiosity, and humility cultivated by Richards and his successors gave English departments a broad social mission. In democratic societies where groups depend upon the ability to persuade each other without resorting to violence, citizens need the capacity to be moved by worthy appeals. Unless citizens possess emotional sensitivity to the feelings of others, curiosity to attend to the reasoning and intuitions behind unfamiliar perspectives, and humility to respect the opinions of credible sources, persuasive appeals based on *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos* would be unlikely to succeed. Arnold saw that democratic societies in which powerful groups fail to persuade each other of the legitimacy of their interests would be vulnerable to dissolution into tribalism and anarchy. The influence of Matthew Arnold, and I.A. Richards on

English departments in the 20th century ensured the discipline had a broad and coherent social mission.

III. Leavisism and New Criticism: Liberal Aesthetics

To work to its full potential, the discipline institutionalized by Richards and his successors required more than a set of skills acquired through reading, however. It also required literature. If the discipline of reading were to give students practice changing their opinions, it was essential that the works they studied meet certain qualitative requirements. To varying degrees and with varying degrees of explicitness, critics in these years thus believed that the works of art most deserving of study were those that made especially compelling or deserving appeals to the judgment of readers. For these appeals to be successful, literary works needed to present experience in especially affecting, illuminating, and impersonal ways. That is, literature needed to appeal to the emotions of readers, to show them something new, and to convey judgments in a credible way.

While similar criteria had been essential to Matthew Arnold's aesthetics, T.S. Eliot's critical essays adapted liberal aesthetic standards for a new generation of critics.⁵ In his essay on the metaphysical poets, Eliot suggests that great poets should convey their intelligence through the interests developed in their works, implicitly suggesting that works of art should appeal to the minds of readers.⁶ More memorably, Eliot also emphasizes the necessity for a great poet's intelligence to be supplemented by and combined with feeling. On Eliot's view, great poetry should not just convey thought as

⁵ See Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" and "Literature and Science."

⁶ "The possible interests of a poet are unlimited; the more intelligent he is the better; the more intelligent he is the more likely that he will have interests: our only condition is that he turn them into poetry, and not merely meditate on them poetically" (Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets" 65).

lucidly as a Samuel Johnson or Alexander Pope, but should also “feel ... thought as immediately as the odour of a rose” (64). In addition to earning status through thought-provoking and emotionally arresting presentations of experience, literary works in Eliot’s view also aim to present experience in an impersonal register. As Eliot saw it, a poem’s thought and emotion cannot depend upon the merely private experience of the artist, which “may be simple, or crude, or flat” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 43). The fully realized work of art instead depends upon the artist’s “surrender of himself” to “something which is more valuable”: that is, “a new art emotion,” realized in a presentation of experience purged of bias, exaggeration, and idiosyncrasy (40, 43).

For Eliot and the critics he influenced, the set of works that met these aesthetic criteria were actively debated. The canon was the provisional (and largely imagined) consensus around these debates. Critics who made aesthetic arguments about the canon took it upon themselves to discriminate between works of art deserving and undeserving of inclusion. According to Eliot, poets as diverse as Tennyson, Browning, and Milton suffered by contrast with metaphysical poets like Donne due to their perceived failure to translate thought into feeling. For F.R. Leavis, most Dickens novels suffered by contrast to those by Austen, Eliot, Conrad, and James for their comparative deficiency in making “connexions and significances” of life in Victorian society visible to readers.⁷ Leavis was similarly exacting in the requirement great art be impersonal and purged of idiosyncrasy. For example, he thought that George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* suffered by contrast to

⁷ Leavis claims that Dickens possesses the “genius ... of a great entertainer,” and that his works do not challenge the adult mind to the same degree as other novelists he discusses. Leavis exempts *Hard Times* from this indictment, suggesting that in that novel, “certain key characteristics of Victorian civilization had clearly come home to him with overwhelming force, embodied in concrete manifestations that suggested to him connexions and significances he had never realized so fully before.”

Austen's novels for its comparatively indulgent presentation of her protagonist, tinged with "an element of self-idealization" and "self-pity."

As these examples likely suggest, Eliot and Leavis's aesthetic judgments about the canon were often conducted at a level of abstraction more likely to be suggestive than convincing to critics with dissenting opinions. But by conceiving of reading practice and aesthetic evaluation alike as "the common pursuit of true judgment," the middle years of the 20th century made literary study coherent as a discipline. Under the influence of Eliot, Richards, and Leavis, the method and objects of literary study cultivated a mutually reinforcing set of attitudes essential to the health of liberal societies:

	<i>Method: liberal reading</i>	<i>Object: liberal aesthetic</i>	<i>Mission: liberal judgment</i>
<i>IDEALS</i>	Sensitive	Affecting	Accommodating
	Curious	Illuminating	Informed
	Humble	Impersonal	Disinterested

Simply put, under Leavisism and the New Criticism, reading literature gave people practice changing their minds. The institutionalized setting of the English department directed students to develop attitudes of sensitivity, curiosity, and humility necessary to interpret opposing views of others with charity rather than hostility. And canonical works of literature familiarized students with the affecting, illuminating, and impersonal presentations of experience necessary to develop more thoughtful views themselves. To the degree that these liberal ideals could be institutionally realized and made available to the public, the result would be a morally intelligent society: a society whose citizens were trained to be accommodating rather than self-righteous, informed rather than ignorant, and disinterested rather than venal or partisan.

IV. Critique and Suspicious Reading

The landscape of literary studies would change dramatically from its liberal humanist foundations in the 1960s. As the United States found itself embroiled in an unjust war abroad and racial discrimination at home, a new generation of professors found little appeal in the liberal ideals of disinterestedness and accommodation.⁸ By the time that Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, Jean Hyppolite and Jacques Lacan were invited to visit Johns Hopkins for a conference in 1966, American English professors were ready to embrace a radically new conception of their discipline. Consciously aligned against the liberal humanism of Leavis and the New Critics, this conference was the starting point for the theory revolution that would transform the study of English over the next two decades and beyond.⁹

Structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and New Historicism named sometimes conflicting and incompatible currents of the theory years. But these schools also had common features and attitudes that allowed them to speak in a powerful and unified way to the sensibilities of left-leaning American professors during an age animated by protest against injustice. Ronan McDonald summarizes the shared methods that united literary critics in these decades: “During the years of high theory from the 1970s to the early 1990s, academic criticism became strongly inflected with an ethos of textual “critique,” a skeptical questioning of socially

⁸ Lionel Trilling offers a more historically contemporaneous take on the shift in the ideals of education that appealed to faculty during the 60s: “By the Sixties, something had happened to reduce the zeal for ... an ideal of general education ... which insisted in the traditional humanistic way that the best citizen is the person who has learned from the great minds and souls of the past. ... The urgency of the problems, the sordidness of the problems, which pressed in upon us from the surrounding world made speculation on education theory seem almost frivolous” (*The Last Decade* 166, 165, 166-7).

⁹ For a few concise summaries of the rise and fall of Theory in the humanities, see Copley, Isenberg, and Wood.

received values and the discursive operations of power and hegemony in literary and cultural texts” (237). The influence of critique would shift the desired attitude cultivated by trained reading from charity to suspicion.¹⁰ To critique a text, one had to learn to be guarded rather than open, focused rather than distracted, and knowing rather than mystified.¹¹

Although critique never fully displaced the older liberal attitudes of reading in the humanities, especially in the classroom, the attitudes required by suspicious reading were directly antithetical to those required by liberal reading. It was not easy to be stoically resistant to the wiles of a text yet also sensitive to its appeals; nor was it a simple matter to focus on a single governing theory while also displaying curiosity toward a text’s ideas. Sacrificing the old liberal ideals of sensitivity, curiosity, and humility in favor of new ones meant that suspicious reading could no longer serve the liberal mission of enabling charity and understanding between disparate social groups.

By training students to read suspiciously, practitioners of critique equipped students for a different social mission, however. As students learned to unmask the authority in linguistic objects, they learned to perceive forms of domination, repression, and exploitation in society. Although many of the methods that critics used to challenge textual authority were ostensibly relativistic and anti-humanist, they all expressed the underlying faith of their historical moment: a faith that structures of power (imperial, racial, and sexual) were currently blocking the path to a more just society, and that those structures could be effectively challenged. After the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights

¹⁰ As late as 2002, Eve Sedgwick would adopt Ricoeur’s phrase, “the hermeneutics of suspicion” to describe “the mainstream of New Historicist, deconstructive, feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic criticism” that currently governed reading practices in English departments (*Touching Feeling* 125).

¹¹ See Felski’s “Suspicious Minds” for a summary of some of these attitudes.

Movement ended, English departments continued to cultivate attitudes that harmonized with reforms championed by the political left. The new, if partly unacknowledged, social mission of English departments during the critique years cohered beautifully with what Christian Smith has called the “liberal progress narrative” embraced by the Democratic party in the United States after the Vietnam War and by the liberal party in Britain.¹² By directing practitioners to challenge arbitrary authority, the skills of critique complemented struggles of identity politics against the oppressive effects of unjust social customs and institutions.

In the years of critique’s inception, the social mission of English departments had become more relevant to the zeitgeist. Practitioners of critique were not watching history unfold with fastidious disinterest in an ivory tower; critique made its participants feel instead like they were participating in historical change. But this new relevance came at a cost. For better or worse, the new social mission of English departments was more partisan than its older liberal mission had been. The values activated by the liberal progress narrative clashed directly with those activated by a countervailing “Reagan narrative,” which valued authority and sanctity and was thus suspicious of the drive toward unfettered liberty.¹³ Just as party realignments after the Vietnam War began to

¹² “Once upon a time, the vast majority of human persons suffered in societies and social institutions that were unjust, unhealthy, repressive, and oppressive. These traditional societies were reprehensible because of their deep-rooted inequality, exploitation, and irrational traditionalism....But the noble human aspiration for autonomy, equality, and prosperity struggled mightily against the forces of misery and oppression, and eventually succeeded in establishing modern, liberal, democratic, capitalist, welfare societies. While modern social conditions hold the potential to maximize the individual freedom and pleasure of all, there is much work to be done to dismantle the powerful vestiges of inequality, exploitation, and repression. This struggle for the good society in which individuals are equal and free to pursue their self-defined happiness is the one mission truly worth dedicating one’s life to achieving” (qtd in Haidt 331).

¹³ “Once upon a time, America was a shining beacon. Then liberals came along and erected an enormous federal bureaucracy that handcuffed the invisible hand of the free market. They subverted our traditional American values and opposed God and faith at every step of the way....Instead of requiring that people work for a living, they siphoned money from hardworking Americans and gave it to Cadillac-driving drug addicts and welfare queens. Instead of punishing criminals, they tried to ‘understand’ them.

make American society more partisan and divided, the rise of critique dictated that the humanities had chosen a side. Beginning in 1970 political diversity in the academy would decrease dramatically and continue thereafter, culminating in the lowest recorded level in 2016.¹⁴

V. Critique and the Aesthetic

Perhaps the most surprising development of the critique decades was not that its social mission became increasingly partisan but that its mission no longer required literature. If one wanted to look for ways that linguistic signs undermined themselves or promoted forms of domination or exclusion, it was not essential to study formally sophisticated works of art. The tools of suspicious reading could be applied just as easily to works of mass culture as they could to the canon. Beginning in the 1960s, Cultural Studies departments accepted this logic and began applying techniques associated with critique to non-literary works. The rise of New Historicism in the 1990s later followed the lead of Cultural Studies in refusing to give literary objects special status.

The new irrelevance of literature to methods of critique—openly acknowledged by Cultural Studies and more begrudgingly so by New Historicism—put professors of literature in a strange position. On the one hand, professors practiced and taught a mode of reading and analysis that didn't require literature to work. On the other hand,

Instead of worrying about the victims of crime, they worried about the rights of criminals....Instead of adhering to traditional American values of family, fidelity, and personal responsibility, they preached promiscuity, premarital sex, and the gay lifestyle...and they encouraged a feminist agenda that undermined traditional family roles....Instead of projecting strength to those who would do evil around the world, they cut military budgets, disrespected our soldiers in uniform, burned our flag, and chose negotiation and multilateralism....Then Americans decided to take their country back from those who sought to undermine it" (qtd in Haidt 332).

¹⁴ Klein and Stern estimate the overall Democrat to Republican ratio in the humanities and social sciences "somewhere between 3.5 and 4" to 1 in 1970, and around "7:1 or 8:1" by 2009 (20, 32). In a 2016 review, Langbert et al. note that the ratio "has gone up markedly over the past ten years," and estimate the Democrat to Republican ratio in the humanities and social sciences at "10:1." (425).

professors were still attached to the aesthetic. Symptoms of this unresolved contradiction between the method and object of literary studies abounded during the critique decades. Perhaps the most telling sign of this contradiction was that some of the most influential practitioners of critique displayed precisely the kind of dazzling attentiveness to the formal complexity of literary works emphasized by the New Critics (see Fessenbecker 2015). In addition to privileging aesthetic complexity at the level of practice, practitioners of critique also privileged the aesthetic at the level of theory, making and accepting questionable arguments for the necessity of formally complex works to critique's social mission. (Was it really true that advancing the Marxist dream of a classless society depended upon close analysis of fissures in the "expressive totalities" created by works of art? [Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 56] Or that overcoming cultural imperialism depended on the study of canonical novels whose "formal inclusiveness, historical honesty, and prophetic suggestiveness" betrayed symptoms of exclusion and domination? [Said 92]). Perhaps the strangest and most contradictory attempt to link the social mission of critique with conceptions of the aesthetic was the attempt to "open the canon" to minority authors in the 1980s and 90s. Instead of making a case for the study of minority works based on their aesthetic merit, advocates for a more inclusive canon sought to debunk the very idea of aesthetic value as a hegemonic construct.¹⁵ Practitioners of critique thus recovered a social urgency for aesthetic debates at the expense of the theoretical ground that gave those debates coherence.

In the same years that saw literary studies become more partisan in its social mission and less coherent in its aesthetics, the popularity of English and other humanistic

¹⁵ See, for example, Herrnstein Smith.

disciplines began to diminish. At the height of the New Criticism in the United States, degrees awarded in the humanities—the most popular of which was English—represented 17.2% of all bachelor's degrees. During the years in which critique rose to prominence in the 1970s and early 80s, though, “the humanities experienced a substantial decline in their share of all bachelor's degrees,” plummeting to the lowest recorded level of 9.9% in 2014.¹⁶

A major factor in the declining appeal of the humanities over these decades was almost certainly the rising cost of college education which began in 1975 to increase significantly above the rate of inflation. But it was also possible that English departments owed their declining prestige to more than the prudence of undergraduates seeking financially lucrative careers. Under critique, the mission of literature departments had become narrower. The idea of reading books to challenge values of authority and sanctity rather than to justify or preserve those values had made the practice of critique anathema to the moral attitudes of conservatives.¹⁷ By contrast, the emphasis common to Leavis and the New Critics on attitudes of reverence for the canon, on moral seriousness, and on criticism as a discipline had given English a broader appeal to conservatives as well as liberals.

The decline of English during the critique years may have owed not only to critique's more partisan social mission but to the diminished status it gave to literature. If the public was willing to buy that great books exhibited linguistic and cultural skills important to human civilization, perhaps they were less willing to buy that the methods of English professors in the academy exhibited skills of comparable value to society. By

¹⁶ <<http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicator.doc.aspx?i=34>>

¹⁷ For a compelling discussion of the moral attitudes of conservatives and liberals, see Haidt.

downplaying its historical commitments to a great literary tradition, English departments stopped advertising their primary competitive advantage over other cultivating disciplines.

VI. Postcritical Reading and the Phenomenological Turn

Critique's dominance in the humanities did not go unchallenged forever. Dissatisfaction with the practice and vocabulary of suspicious reading began to take hold in the late 1980s. Scandals such as the revelation of Paul de Man's Nazi sympathies and the "Sokal Hoax" tarnished the prestige of critique in English departments, as did various satirical jabs at the style of theory-inflected writing from journals such as *Dissent* or *Philosophy and Literature*.¹⁸ In addition to facing challenges from scandal and satire, the practice and vocabulary of suspicious reading also received resistance from voices who had become critique's most influential proponents. Although critics including Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and Terry Eagleton were instrumental in bringing vocabularies and practices of theory to a new generation of literary critics, these and others—including Christopher Norris, Harold Bloom, and Frank Lentricchia—all shifted emphasis later in their careers, exploring practices of reading and analysis antithetical to their previous work.¹⁹ The changed emphasis of former proponents of critique helped inspire a growing body of meta-criticism over the next two decades that directly confronts the ethical and methodological limitations of suspicious reading and poses alternatives to it. Rita Felski associates these attempts to move beyond critique while also

¹⁸ The physicist Alan Sokal managed to publish a bogus essay "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" in a 1996 issue of *Social Text*, while Brian Morton wrote a satirical essay "How Not to Write for *Dissent*" for a 1990 issue of *Dissent*, and Denis Dutton ran the "Bad Writing Contests" of *Philosophy and Literature* from 1995-1998.

¹⁹ See Eve Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (2003), Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (2004), and Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005).

incorporating its insights with an aspiration to become “postcritical.” For Felski, postcritical readers explore alternatives to suspicious reading while also remaining wary of tendencies to lapse into uncritical or merely impressionistic modes of judgment.

One significant current in these postcritical conversations is an ongoing turn to phenomenology. Inspired by the philosophical tradition of Hegel, Heidegger, and especially Paul Ricoeur, literary critics including Wayne Booth, Richard Rorty, Charles Altieri, Eve Sedgwick, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, Timothy Bewes, Graham Harman, Bruno Latour, Heather Love, and Rita Felski have helped bring ideals associated with charitable reading back into prominence. Often explicitly aligned against the theoretical assumptions of critique, these phenomenological defenses of reading prize the liberal ideals of sensitivity, curiosity, and humility essential to the cultivating mission that English departments inherited from Matthew Arnold.

Much of this work has drawn on phenomenology to associate reading with ideals of affective sensitivity. Eve Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling* draws on Paul Ricoeur’s work to contrast a “reparative” stance toward reading with the “paranoid” stance of suspicious reading. Her work inspired its own affective turn in literary studies which has contributed to “an intellectual climate notably more receptive to thick descriptions of experiential states” (Felski *Uses of Literature* 19). Also inspired by Ricoeur, Rita Felski’s defense of “neophenomenology” advocates an approach to interpretation that “pivots on our first-person implication and involvement in what we read” (“After Suspicion” 31). Rather than adopting an impersonal focus “on transpersonal and usually linguistic structures of determination,” this approach to reading strives for “a greater receptivity to the multifarious and many-shaded moods of texts” (“Critique and the Hermeneutics,” *Limits*

12). Along with Felski, other scholars including Yves Citton, Marielle Macé, Nikolas Kompridis, Richard Kearney, and Michel Chaouli have drawn on phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions to recover modes of reading that attend to the “immersive and affective dimensions” of literary experience (“Critique and the Hermeneutics”).²⁰

Recent recoveries of phenomenological reading do not only privilege attitudes of affective sensitivity but of analytical curiosity. Instead of treating texts as occasions for the illustration of predetermined truths about the nature of capital, textuality, or desire, these approaches to reading make use of categories of thought immanent to their object of study. Timothy Bewes quotes the advice Deleuze once gave to students in a seminar to describe this posture: “You must let [the author] speak for himself, analyze the frequency of his words, the style of his own obsessions. His thought invents its own coordinates and develops along its own axes” (qtd. in Bewes 25). Rather than anticipating what to expect from a text before one encounters it, this openness to the thought of individual texts bespeaks a willingness to experience the flashes of insight Ricoeur describes as “revelation” (8). Bewes’s “reading with the grain” coheres closely with Charles Altieri’s Hegelian defense of the sensuousness of literary experience against the utopian political pieties of New Materialism,²¹ and also with Steven Connor’s privileging of “cultural phenomenology” against what he calls “the machine of critical theory” (24). Resembling ethnography more than theory, Connor’s cultural phenomenology avoids reducing “the plurality and analytic nonsaturability of cultural experience to common currencies and finalising formulae of all kinds” (24). In lieu of focus on “abstract structures, functions and dynamics,” such reading employs a patient and curious attention to the concrete

²⁰ See Felski’s *The Limits of Critique*: 175-185 for a summary of this work.

²¹ See Altieri’s “The Sensuous Dimension of Literary Experience.”

specificity of cultural objects (18). Along with Graham Harman's "object-oriented criticism," and Heather Love's "close but not deep reading," these phenomenological modes of reading resist imposing terms of analysis on objects of study and instead acknowledge the capacity of texts to do their own thinking.

Phenomenological reading in the tradition of Ricoeur depends not only on sensitivity and curiosity, but humility. Rather than placing confidence in one's ability to master language, or to subordinate it to one's uses, this approach to reading places confidence in language's capacity to shape one's own being in the world: it exchanges a "willingness to suspect," for a "willingness to listen" (Ricoeur 27). As Timothy Bewes puts it, this posture approaches the text with "the absolute confidence of being spoken to" (28). In a similar vein, Altieri suggests that attention to the internal dynamics of texts is "capable of affecting our sense of possible actions and possible ways of caring for others" ("Sensuous Dimension" 79); Felski champions literature for its capacity to "shake up and reconfigure" the preferences of students while inviting "new attachments, affinities, [and] interpretative repertoires" ("After Suspicion" 33, 32); Richard Rorty defends engagements with literature that "instill doubts" into students' self-images and that "expand" their "moral imaginations" (Social Hope 127); and Wayne Booth defends literary encounters that change what readers "desire to desire" (Company 271). This emphasis on the potential of reading to affect the "ways of caring," "attachments," "imaginings," and "desire[s]," bespeaks an interest in shifting authority away from critics and towards texts. This open and humble stance toward texts contrasts sharply with the "knowingness" required by suspicious reading—or forms of reading that position "the critic as the real author" responsible for "producing whatever in [the text] is

related to truth” (Rorty *Achieving* 126; Best and Marcus 15). Instead of assuming the reader’s role is to pass judgment on texts, these approaches allow for texts to pass judgment on readers.²²

In sum, many critics have turned to phenomenology to theorize modes of reading that refuse the protocols of suspicious hermeneutics. Critics in these conversations privilege stances of subjective investment above scientific detachment, flexible recollection above rigid abstraction, and humble accommodation above arrogant dismissiveness. By privileging ideals of emotional sensitivity, analytical curiosity, and humble receptivity, this phenomenological turn in literary studies has recovered liberal ideals of charitable reading once central to the discipline. By consciously displaying sensitivity, curiosity, and receptivity to texts, the phenomenological reader treats the text like a liberal is expected to treat the views of fellow interlocutors. The postcritical reader and liberal citizen alike assume that exposure to new views is necessary to refine their own partial and incomplete perspectives.

In 1989, Wayne Booth introduced the term “coduction” to describe a method of reading inspired by phenomenology and governed by the protocols of Aristotelian practical reasoning.²³ For Booth, coduction begins with the experience of intuitive judgment elicited in the reading experience: “a direct sense that something now before us has yielded an experience that we find comparatively desirable, admirable, lovable, or, on the other hand, comparatively repugnant, contemptible or hateful” (*The Company* 71). As

²² A renewed interest in stances of humility is also shared by Michael Warner, who advocates for renewed attention to complex traditions of “uncritical” reading inspired by biblical hermeneutics as a rival framework to critical reading.

²³ In addition to using coduction to refer to the experience of comparative judgment between reader and text, Booth also uses the term to describe the experience of comparative judgment between fellow readers who seek to resolve their competing views of a text.

works of art elicit these new experiences and judgments, readers can compare them against their own “untraceably complex experiences of other stories and persons” (71). To the degree that these past views now seem limited or misguided in comparison to those newly elicited by the work of art, readers can choose to form a new view that corrects for past limitations and misconceptions. Readers “try out each new pattern of desire against those that [they] have found surviving past reflections, and ...then decide ...that this new pattern is or is not an improvement over what [they] have previously desired to desire” (272). Of a piece with other modes of reading inspired by phenomenology and hermeneutics, Booth’s method of “coduction” is one of many methodological interventions that aim to recover the liberal and humanist ideal of reading as “the common pursuit of true judgment” (Eliot “The Function of Criticism” 69).

VII. Postcritical Aesthetics?

While the ongoing turn to phenomenology has recovered ideals associated with charitable reading, these conversations have had much less to say about the objects that support the reading practices they recommend. Intuitively, it would seem that a humble attitude to one’s object makes more sense if one is reading a classic than a work of pulp fiction; so too, a receptive attitude to ideas would seem to make more sense with a philosophical treatise than with “a wordless melody” (Booth, *The Company* 17). Qualitative and formal differences in one’s objects of study play a significant role in determining the utility of one’s chosen approach to reading. Yet advocates of postcritical reading methods have done surprisingly little to articulate qualities of literary objects that would justify the turn away from suspicion that they recommend. It’s as if defenders of

postcritical reading are suggesting that the profession take up chisels rather than drills without telling us anything about the objects to which our tools will be applied.²⁴

Marjorie Levinson's summary of essays defending new formalist methods of reading speaks to the state of the turn away from critique more generally: "Because new formalism's argument is with prestige and praxis, one finds in the literature ...no efforts to re-theorize art, ...or even—and this is a surprise—form. ...Despite the proliferation in these essays of synonyms for form (e.g., genre, style, reading, literature, 'significant literature,' the aesthetic, coherence, autonomy) none of the essays puts redefinition front and center" (561).²⁵ As Levinson's comments suggest, the aesthetic has remained a largely implicit and unacknowledged precondition of postcritical reading practices rather than an explicitly defined pillar of them. Even after the turn from critique, ideas of the aesthetic, the literary, and the canonical once central to the discipline of literary studies persist today in the discipline as something like apologetic afterthoughts. For most of us, conceptions of the literary and the canonical are evoked only implicitly in criticism and explicitly perhaps only in the classroom, if even there. To the extent that we hesitate to make aesthetic judgments about the objects most useful to our reading practices, though, new theorizations about disciplinary methods are doomed to remain partial and question-begging. Until we self-consciously address the aesthetic criteria on which our reading practices depend, "resurgent conceptions of literariness and the canon" will continue to

²⁴ For example, Wayne Booth allows the possibility that coduction might be applied to any communication that "re-orders, enhances, or interprets unnarrated life," from "novels" to a "wordless melody" (*The Company* 17); and Rita Felski allows that postcritical attitudes to reading could apply just as easily to pop songs and horror movies as to novels ("Context Stinks!" 586).

²⁵ Levinson cites Jonathan Loesberg's *A Return to Aesthetics*; and Isobal Armstrong's *The Radical Aesthetic* as positive exceptions to the neglect of aesthetics she attributes to the new formalists.

arise as symptoms, attesting to the unresolved dissonance between our theories and practice (Guillory 265).

This book is animated by the desire to recover an aesthetic for the liberal reading practice on which our discipline was founded.²⁶ I've argued that English departments abandoned this aesthetic in the turn to critique only to find it returning as an unspoken element in recent postcritical defenses of reading. The task of this book is to bring the liberal aesthetic on which charitable reading depends into the light of day. What works of art most effectively model the liberal skills of accommodating judgment that still govern much of our research and teaching? What formal and qualitative criteria allow texts to reward stances of sensitivity, curiosity, and humility? What books should we read if we want to cultivate moral intelligence?

VIII. In Search of a Liberal Aesthetic

Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot had supplied me with qualitative criteria for this liberal aesthetic: I knew I was looking for works that present experience in especially affecting, illuminating, and impersonal ways.²⁷ While I accepted these qualitative standards as regulating ideals, Eliot and Arnold's applications of these standards seemed narrower and more ad hoc than I wanted. For instance, it seemed more than coincidental that two celebrated poets happened to focus primarily on poetry in their canonizing efforts. Although I agreed with I.A. Richards that poetry was an invaluable pedagogical

²⁶ By way of brief qualification, I would note that there are many kinds of non-liberal reading practices worthy of formalized study that would entail different aesthetic criteria than those I advocate here. An aesthetics for Marxist or postcolonial reading might be best repaid by works with especially insightful depictions of class and power, for example, while a canon for psychoanalytic or queer reading might be best rewarded by works with especially complex and rich depictions of desire.

²⁷ According to Eliot's aesthetics, for example, one should prefer Donne's poetry to Milton's for its affecting power ("The Metaphysical Poets" 64). And according to Arnold's aesthetics, one should prefer Goethe's poetry over Byron's for its comparatively illuminating and disinterested presentation of experience ("The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" 27).

tool, I wondered if other genres might make equally or more compelling appeals to the practical judgments of readers. Was impersonality, for example, an aesthetic standard that the genre of poetry was especially well-suited to achieve? My sense was that poetry inclines more to lyrical and subjective expression more than it does to accommodating and disinterested modes of judgment. If liberalism conceived of true judgment as that which emerges from a clash of standpoints, wouldn't genres that gave more allowance for competing voices have an advantage?

Because of my skepticism about the individualized modes of feeling promoted by poetry, the canonizing efforts that most intrigued me were not Arnold's or Eliot's, but Leavis's in *The Great Tradition*. I was struck by Leavis's declaration that the great tradition of English novelists began with Jane Austen and continued with other realist authors. From my experience reading Austen, Eliot, and James, I knew that works in the British realist tradition were capable of persuading readers to accommodate different viewpoints. These novels did not only convey the enigmatic emotional states of a single speaker, but offered an array of perspectives made comprehensible and evaluated by the narrative. I shared Leavis's intuition that the attention to form in these novels was inseparable from authors' "responsibility towards a rich human interest ... involving, of its very nature, imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination and judgment of relative human value" (29). Leavis wasn't clear about specific formal techniques these novelists employed, but I was interested by his suggestion that their formal sophistication made them especially useful for liberal reading.

I was happy to find that Martha Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* corroborated Leavis's assertion that literary form was an essential element of a liberal aesthetic. Like

Booth, Nussbaum argues that fictional texts can help readers engage in the kind of Aristotelian reasoning championed by J.S. Mill.²⁸ Nussbaum goes further than Booth, however, in emphasizing the importance of literary form for such clash-of-standpoints reasoning. Insofar as practical reasoning depends upon “perspicuous description” of alternative views that “already contain an element of evaluation and response,” Nussbaum suggests that these views need to be presented in a medium designed to affect the emotions of readers. To emphasize the importance of this aesthetic criterion, Nussbaum contrasts the language of analytic philosophy with the language of realist fiction, arguing that the “correct, scientific, abstract, hygienically pallid” tone of “Anglo-American philosophical prose” fails to capture ethical views with the “lucidity and completeness” exhibited by fictional texts (19). Nussbaum’s work corroborated Matthew Arnold’s emphasis on the importance of affecting style, or “poetry and eloquence,” in literature (“Literature and Science” 129). And, like Arnold, Nussbaum also helped me limit my search for the objects of a liberal aesthetic.²⁹ From their work I understood that the objects of liberal reading required a style of affecting language not present in analytic philosophy, but present in many fictional works, especially realist novels and Greek tragedy.

Hoping to write a dissertation on books in my field, though, I could afford to further limit my search. I wondered if theorists of the novel could help me refine the

²⁸ Insofar as fictional texts depict “alternative views about the good life,” Nussbaum suggests, they can help readers “arrive at a view that is internally coherent, and also at one that is broadly shared and sharable” (173-174).

²⁹ Like Nussbaum, Arnold contrasts the dry style of philosophy with the more affecting rhetoric of literary works like the gospel of Luke: “Why should it be one thing, in its effect upon the emotions, to say with Spinoza, *Felicitas in eo consistit quod homo suum esse conservare potest*—‘Man’s happiness consists in his being able to preserve his own essence,’ and quite another thing, in its effect upon the emotions, to say, ‘What is a ‘Man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, forfeit himself?’” (“Literature and Science”).

scope of a canon for liberal reading that would make a special claim for the kinds of realist novels that Leavis discussed. Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" offered an arresting way to justify the significance of the novel form for liberal reading. In contrast to poetic discourse that "strips the word of others' intentions," Bakhtin's novelistic discourse is "entangled, shot through with shared thoughts; points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (507). Insofar as novelistic discourse stages collisions between "specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values," I could see how the novel might possess a distinct utility for the pluralistic and accommodating ethos of liberal reading (503). Although I accepted Bakhtin's distinction between novelistic and poetic discourse, I wondered if many works written in verse might also be novelistic in precisely the way he described. Couldn't it be said that Sophocles's choruses, Milton's devils, and Shakespeare's fools, for example, also expose readers to world views entangled with "alien value judgments and accents"? Granting that the full set of objects corresponding to Bakhtin's novelistic discourse was almost certainly broader than the novel, I accepted the novelistic genre as a formal constraint for my liberal aesthetic.

Georg Lukacs's *The Theory of the Novel* helped me think about other formal and qualitative requirements that could limit my search for a liberal aesthetic even further. If Bakhtin's discussion of discourse allowed me to see how novels present readers with illuminating views of experience, Lukacs's discussion of the problematic individual allowed me to see how novels convey impersonal views of experience. In *The Theory*, Lukacs associates the novel form with its depiction of a certain kind of hero, the problematic individual, who faces the problem of reconciling the convictions of his

innermost soul with the external practices of life in society. The novel, in Lukacs's view, conveys the successes and failures of the hero to effect this reconciliation between subject and object. For Lukacs, the novel is constrained by the requirement to get it right: the rhetoric will seem implausible if the reconciliation was forced and will fall flat and leave readers cold if no attempts at reconciliation succeeded.

Crucially for Lukacs, the novel's success depends on more than the emotionally moving language emphasized by Nussbaum. The very same "enchantment," or "poetic glow," that Nussbaum recognizes in Dickens rings "false" and "inadequate" to Lukacs (107).³⁰ Insofar as Dickens allows heroes to come to terms with bourgeois society "without conflict," Lukacs suggests that his novels fail to achieve the aesthetic standard of the genre. For Lukacs, the novel's willingness to test the views of its protagonist through experience is a demanding constraint. A novel can easily fail either by being too indulgent to its protagonist or too severe: or more commonly, by neglecting to imagine the right situations necessary to challenge the protagonist's opinions to a sufficient degree. In the best novels—which for Lukacs, are realist novels—the narrative form needs to correct the incomplete views expressed by the protagonist as they collide with experience. Effectively, the novel calibrates new judgments for readers that more closely accord with their object. It made perfect sense to discover that Lukacs had been a Hegelian when he wrote *The Theory*. Lukacs presents the novel as an immanent critique of the subjective views of its central character. By dramatizing experiences of alienation, or failures of alignment between character and world, novels engage readers in the

³⁰ Nussbaum, for instance, uses a discussion of Dickens's *David Copperfield* as an example of the "seductions" and "enchantments" of the novel form which "can lead the reader past her tendencies to deny complexity, to evade the messiness of feeling" (238).

phenomenological process of acquiring views that accommodate experience in a more complete way. Lukacs's citation of Hegel confirmed my sense that realist novels were a special technology for the achievement of the disinterested judgment prized by phenomenology and liberal criticism alike.

As with Bakhtin's appreciation of novelistic discourse, I suspected that Lukacs's appreciation for the problematic individual could be extrapolated to a broader set of works than realist fiction; it seemed to me that many works of romance, tragedy, and melodrama also subject the views of protagonists seeking reconciliation to demanding tests by experience.³¹ But Lukacs had helped me narrow the scope of the liberal canon even further. After ruling out analytic philosophy and many works of poetry, I could now rule out most non-realist novels. But what features distinguished the qualitative achievement of realist novelists like Dickens from other novelists that Lukacs admired? With the exception of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*—which I was unable to accept as the only work in a liberal canon—Lukacs's work was short on examples of works that accomplish the formal and aesthetic criteria he described.

I looked at more contemporary scholarship on realism to see if it might give me more precise formal requirements of a liberal aesthetic. I sympathized with the intuitions of critics like George Levine and Harry Shaw who resisted the lower status that the critique years had given to realism, and insisted that these texts were epistemologically sophisticated—far from the transparent and deluded repositories of ideology suspicious readers have made them out to be. I especially liked Elizabeth Ermarth's suggestion that realism is the genre of consensus: that realist narration underscores the essential relations

³¹ Lukacs's interest in realism didn't diminish my appreciation for the tests to which Oscar Wilde subjects Dorian Gray's aestheticism, for instance.

between a series of particular episodes, thus “invit[ing] us to reach for the inner dimension where differences are reconciled” (*Realism and Consensus* 47). Ermarth also suggests, helpfully, that the lack of narration in epistolary novels makes it more difficult for them reveal “a final form of the whole” to readers (57). Since I was looking for novels that invited readers to accommodate competing perspectives, I used Ermarth’s criterion of realist narration as a justification to exclude epistolary novels as well. With the exception of Ermarth, this group of scholars was generally more cautious than I would have liked in passing judgment on works that failed to meet the formal aesthetic criteria for realist novels that they discussed. To isolate the formal and qualitative features that made realist novels more helpful than others in promoting liberal habits of mind I would need to continue looking.

I turned next to scholarship on British realism that dealt explicitly with Victorian liberalism. Amanda Anderson, Elaine Hadley, and David Wayne Thomas all legitimated the idea that novelists in the British realist tradition were informed by ideals of liberalism, and their work enriched my understanding of both traditions. These scholars didn’t locate the liberalism of these novels in their use of formal or aesthetic criteria, however, but in their use of privileged characters to explicitly thematize liberal ideals.³²

The thematic focus of this scholarship didn’t back up Leavis’s assertion that the formal

³² David Wayne Thomas, Elaine Hadley, and Amanda Anderson, all analyze conjunctions between ideals of mid-Victorian liberalism and Victorian novels. For instance, Thomas analyzes Camden Farebrother’s cultivation of reflective agency in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (*Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic*, [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004], pp. 7-15); Hadley discusses Septimus Harding’s display of disinterestedness in Anthony Trollope’s *The Warden* (*Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*, [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010]: pp. 63-125); and Anderson addresses Daniel Deronda’s expression of many-sidedness in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (*The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001]: pp. 119-47). By analyzing how novels use exemplary characters to directly thematize liberal ideals in this way, though, this body of work does not consider how novels promoted such ideals through formal structures in which characters were presented.

preoccupation of realist authors was inseparable from their aesthetic achievement. To further refine my criteria for a liberal aesthetics I would need to keep looking.

Both Lukacs's *Theory of the Novel* and scholarship on Victorian realism had focused heavily on character: the problematic individual, for Lukacs, and characters (both primary and secondary) who modeled liberal views for Anderson, Hadley, and Thomas. Even though Bakhtin had focused on discourse rather than character, I wondered if characters could function as mouthpieces of the clashing vocabularies of value Bakhtin described. Were there any specialized techniques of characterization that could help me discriminate between realist novels more or less useful for a liberal aesthetic?

I found that work on character has undergone a modest renaissance in recent years. The cognitivist approaches of David Palmer, Blakey Vermeule and Lisa Zunshine argue that fictional characters can help readers map intermental activity of other minds. Deidre Lynch's materialist scholarship emphasizes character's ideological function for readers seeking to position themselves within economies of prestige. And Alex Woloch's formalist work explores how character-systems in the nineteenth-century novel distribute the attention of readers. As different as these approaches are, they all emphasize the crucial role that fictional characters play in informing the judgments of readers. Insofar as fictional characters act in coherent ways that invite evaluation, they function as sites for readers to practice forming judgments: learning to assess the extent to which actions cohere under value-laden categories such as modest and vain, earnest and flippant, or trustworthy and treacherous.

While the emphasis on judgment in all this scholarship confirmed my intuition that fictional characters mattered for liberal reading, Woloch's work was by far the most

useful for my quest to isolate a liberal aesthetic. In his analysis of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Woloch demonstrates that the novel uses relations between characters to invite readers to discriminate between desirable and undesirable moral qualities. He suggested further that this comparative process of judgment followed the logic of the Aristotelian dialectic: Austen's character-systems transform the novel "into a genre that abstracts, elucidates, and diagnoses human characteristics," by "facilitating contrasts between inner qualities" (53). From this analysis, I could see how novels used characters not only to instruct readers but to inform them by triggering intuitions relevant to practical judgment. In *Pride and Prejudice*, major and minor characters play the functional role of allowing readers to see what successful and unsuccessful enactments of virtue look like in practice. By inviting readers to perceive different perspectives in relation, character-systems showed readers the interdependence of seemingly irreconcilable opinions. Woloch's discussion of the character-system gave me a crucial formal device that realist novels use to facilitate the clash-of-standpoint reasoning championed by Aristotle and Mill.

Based on Woloch's work, I could narrow my liberal canon much further, looking for works like *Pride and Prejudice* whose character-systems reflect "a strong interiority [that] grapples with the outside world and absorbs it into categories of consciousness" (133). This meant that otherwise brilliant novels that use character-systems differently—such as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*—could be ruled out.³³ I wondered, though, if there might be an even better fit for a liberal aesthetic than the one-sided

³³"In Dickens, the protagonist's interiority is overwhelmed by the very exterior content that it attempts to process, and this condition also underlies the structure of the character-system, motivating the strong minor characters who are, in one sense, the distorted consequence of the protagonist's incomplete processes of consciousness and perception" (Woloch 133).

dynamic between major and minor characters Woloch observed in *Pride and Prejudice*. What about characters who were neither minor characters nor protagonists—characters whose attitudes differed conspicuously from the protagonist but were not treated merely as inadequate ways of thinking to be discarded? Could these characters be formal devices that help readers practice the liberal habit of many-sided judgment?

IX. Expressive Realism as Liberal Aesthetic

That question animated my research. But I knew that prominent secondary characters were only one piece of the puzzle in my emerging liberal aesthetic: necessary but certainly not sufficient for an aesthetics governed by the liberal ideal of accommodating judgment. To construct a canon for liberal reading, I knew I needed to figure out how the various formal devices I had discovered in my research fit together. What formal features make certain realist novels especially suited to the common pursuit of true judgment? I knew the test of the liberal aesthetics I hoped to construct would be its ability to make distinctions: I would need to be able to discriminate, as Leavis had been willing to do, between major novels useful for liberal humanist criticism and minor works that were less useful. But unlike Leavis, I would have to be able to show my work: the grounds for inclusion beyond a few provocative judgments interspersed with unsystematic observations of novels.

In Chapter 1, “Expressive Realism and the Phenomenological Turn,” I propose formal and qualitative criteria that make realist novels effective instruments of liberal persuasion. Drawing from Bakhtin, Lukacs, and others, I propose three specialized techniques of characterization that novels use to enlighten the practical judgments of readers. I call these devices articulation, enactment, and juxtaposition, and they

correspond loosely to a novel's discourse, story, and character-system. By showing how characters' value-laden commitments are articulated in concepts, enacted in concrete situations, and juxtaposed alongside opposing commitments, I argue that novels invite readers to engage in practical reasoning. I discuss examples and counterexamples of novels that use these devices, and introduce the term "expressive realism" to describe the set of novels in which all these devices are present.

One surprising conclusion this chapter draws is that the attitudes of expressive realist novels parallel those of the postcritical reader. First, expressive realist novels are sensitive: they don't try to eliminate emotion to view experience objectively, but instead allow subjective emotion to infuse their description of experience. Second, these novels are curious. Instead of subjecting experience to preconceived ideas, they work to derive their ideas immanently, adjusting their conceptual vocabulary to fit closely with the experiences they describe. And finally, while these novels are confident they are not knowing: they don't automatically assume a stance of superiority toward the various views they describe. Instead, these novels aim to make visible the appealing elements of views, even if those views clash with the novel's primary ethical theme. Chapter 1 thus confirms Timothy Bewes's assertion that the interpretive practice of Ricoeurian phenomenology is "tied to the novel form" (4). The formal devices that realist novels use to inform judgment are the results of the novel's own phenomenological reading of experience. Rejecting external standards, finalizing formula, and presuppositions, novels begin with engaged, first-person experience and put it to the test. In so doing, novels model the kind of immanent interpretation of experience that critics dissatisfied with

suspicious hermeneutics have begun to embrace. Expressive realist novels are postcritical readers *par excellence*.

The idea of novels as postcritical readers was intriguing, but I wondered about the “post” in postcritical reading. Is it really true that the phenomenological readers model charitable attitudes not found in practitioners of suspicious reading? As I continued to investigate the postcritical turn in literary studies, I had the feeling that if the suspicious reader of the critique years had never existed it would have been necessary to invent him. Despite the thoughtful qualifications and pleas for pluralism in this literature, it was clear that suspicious reading was not primarily a historical entity so much as the negative self-image of a new movement of criticism seeking to portray itself as progress. Just as critique had required the pious, unprofessional, and impressionistic caricature of the New Critical reader, postcritical reading required the caricature of the aloof, reductive, and smug suspicious reader.

I wondered how my idea of novels as postcritical readers would change if I compared them against an actual practitioner of critique. So in Chapter 2, I test the hypothesis that expressive realist novels interpret experience more charitably than works of suspicious reading. Franco Moretti’s recent book, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* was the perfect critical case study for my project. A self-conscious and dialectically savvy provocateur of contemporary criticism, Moretti practices a version of critique far removed from any caricature of suspicious reading. I selected George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* as a novel to compare alongside Moretti’s study. An exemplary achievement of expressive realism, *The Odd Women* offers its own critical “reading” of bourgeois culture by depicting an earnest and disciplined protagonist

alongside an ironic aesthete who challenges her way of life. To a degree this chapter confirms my hypothesis: it finds that *The Odd Women*'s reading of bourgeois culture exceeds the limitations of Moretti's critical mode in two respects. By using characters to articulate both critical and appreciative views of bourgeois culture, *The Odd Women* cultivates situated and charitable modes of critical judgment unmatched in Moretti's study. This chapter also finds, more unexpectedly, that *The Odd Women*'s reading of experience does not just make it an ideal postcritical reader but also an ideal suspicious reader. By presenting experience in ways that are descriptive rather than impressionistic and demystified rather than reverent, *The Odd Women* exhibits virtues central to the ethos of critique expressed by Moretti's study.

The book's remaining chapters discuss other exemplary works of expressive realism selected to convey a sense of the historical evolution of this liberal aesthetic in Britain. However artificial the process of exclusion always is in these cases, I wanted to single out novels that gave readers some sense of how expressive realist novels evolved in relation to the British realist tradition. So I chose one novel relevant to realism's departure from the epistolary novel in the early 19th century, one to represent the expressive realist aesthetic at its height of popularity in the mid 19th century, and one to represent realism's collision with aestheticism at the beginning of the 20th.

The choice to limit my discussion in each chapter to only a single novel came with sacrifices. The cost of this indulgent attention to only four novels has the unfortunate effect of obscuring continuity of aesthetic achievement between works I discuss and many deserving works I do not. However, I felt that this narrowed scope was essential for my chosen method. Each chapter uses close textual analysis designed to help

fellow readers notice afresh their expert use of dialogue, narration, and character juxtaposition. I also thought that close textual analysis was essential for making the ethical dimension of my arguments persuasive to fellow readers. The arguments of each chapter proceed through coduction, feeling along with a sense of how the novels themselves are evaluating the characters they depict. Because the value-judgments I take from the novels depend on interpretation and are thus potentially disputable, I wanted to give readers enough of the novels discussed so that they would not need to trust my assertions about what the novels do but can rather see for themselves. By aligning my arguments with evaluations of character implicit in the novels themselves, each chapter aims to let the content of each work determine its own significance.

I thought about beginning with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which Woloch had discussed as an exemplary instance of the realist character-system. In that novel, Elizabeth Bennet effortlessly enacts both the ironic playfulness exhibited by Mr. Bennet and the dutiful responsibility exhibited by Mr. Darcy. Much like the mature protagonists of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* or Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, Elizabeth Bennet models an Aristotelian mean between extremes exhibited by secondary characters. As such, I agreed with Woloch and other Austen critics that the novel could aid liberal readers interested in the Aristotelian reconciliation of competing views.

I admired the aesthetic achievement of *Pride and Prejudice* immensely. But after decades of critique and identity politics that have seen realist novels and liberal thought alike unfairly maligned for their false reconciliations, I didn't want my selection of texts to contribute to caricatures of these traditions as naïve or overly optimistic.³⁴ Inspired by

³⁴ See Anderson's *Bleak Liberalism* for a defense of liberalism against some of these objections.

the dialectical method that Hegel had described as “the path of despair,” I instead looked instead for novels whose treatment of protagonists insisted more stubbornly on alienation. I wanted novels whose protagonists were flawed even when mature, and thus conveyed the extent to which any practical expression of value is inherently limited, expressing only one side of the truth. I felt that imperfect protagonists would make a novel’s liberal demand to accommodate opposing viewpoints more insistent.

My interest in imperfect protagonists led me to select *Mansfield Park* as the novel most significant for the inception of the expressive realist aesthetic. In Chapter 3, “The Problem of Judgment in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*,” I argue that the novel thwarts readers’ desires for ethical closure by depicting characters who express conflicting virtues. Even as the novel takes pains to reveal the superiority of the sincere and dutiful Fanny Price to the urban interlopers, Mary and Henry Crawford, the novel also allows its villains to upstage the protagonist. I argue that readers of *Mansfield Park* are made to feel the degree to which the reserved, passive, and constrained Fanny Price suffers by comparison to the comparatively open, energetic, and generous Crawfords. The novel’s “power to offend,” to borrow Lionel Trilling’s phrase, is commensurate with the reader’s feeling of unresolved dissonance between the one-sided judgments voiced by Fanny and the many-sided judgments invited by the novel’s depiction of her romantic rival and rejected suitor. More than forty years before attention to the many-sided mind would emerge within British intellectual life more broadly, *Mansfield Park* presses the novel form to move beyond an Aristotelian appreciation for a single virtuous mean between extremes to a Hegelian appreciation of incommensurable virtues in their practical conflict.

Chapter 4 considers George Eliot's *Middlemarch* as another exemplary work of expressive realism whose character-system invites many-sided judgment in readers. Liberal habits of judgment have been much discussed in Eliot scholarship, but by locating Eliot's liberalism either in the thematic content of particular novels or in the more general effect of Eliot's style, both recent and older studies of Eliot's fiction have paid little attention to specific rhetorical techniques that her novels use to promote liberal habits of mind. I argue that Eliot adapts the technique of character juxtaposition pioneered by Austen to cultivate habits of judgment championed by J.S. Mill. To make this case, I focus on secondary characters in Eliot's *Middlemarch* including Will Ladislaw, Camden Farebrother, and especially Fred Vincy, all of whom express an ethos of spontaneous enjoyment that contrasts with Dorothea Brooke's ethos of disciplined sympathy. Insofar as *Middlemarch* uses the liberated practice of characters like Fred as a positive standard by which to clarify the comparatively constrained aspects of Dorothea's sympathy, the novel invites readers to cultivate "many-sided" evaluation of practically opposed commitments.

Mid-century Victorians worried that the rising influence of aestheticism in Victorian culture would eventually displace liberal judgment in favor of a relativistic surrender to experience. The influence of aestheticism on Henry James's late novels thus make them a helpful limit case for the expressive realist tradition. Much ethical criticism sees James's fiction as exhibiting a proto-modernist style that teaches readers to refuse the clarity of predetermined thought for the ambiguity of surprised feeling. These critics locate the ethic of James's fiction in its reverent appreciation for alterity, or a principled refusal to subject human lives to the objectifying categories of thought. In chapter 5,

“Henry James at the Ethical Turn: Imagination and Discrimination in *The Ambassadors*,”

I defend a more mid-Victorian view of James’s fiction that accounts for his novels’ impulses towards abstraction, cognition, and judgment. In keeping with James’s description of *The Ambassadors* as a “fusion of synthesis and picture,” I examine how the novel uses its character-system not only to disrupt evaluative categories but to synthetically construct them. I argue that James clarifies the strengths and weaknesses of his protagonist’s perspective by juxtaposing Strether’s ethos of imaginative exploration alongside Mrs. Newsome’s administrative efficiency, Chad Newsome’s polished suavity, and Maria Gostrey’s discriminating synthesis. By continuing a mid-Victorian tradition of many-sided characterization, James’s novel not only cultivates feelings that attend to the particularity of characters’ attitudes but thoughts that attend to the holistic way these attitudes cohere. As with other novelists in the expressive realist tradition, *The Ambassadors* uses characters to cultivate many-sided judgment, inviting readers to a disinterested appreciation of clashing standpoints.

Chapter 1: Expressive Realism and the Phenomenological Turn: A Canon for Postcritical Literary Studies

I. Postcritical Phenomenology

In a 2004 essay titled “Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” Bruno Latour contends that attitudes and methods of critique long cultivated in the humanities have reached a point of diminishing returns. In an era where attitudes of suspicion are widespread beyond the academy—manifesting in skeptical attitudes about global warming, conspiracy theories about 9/11, doubt about the efficacy of vaccines, or cynicism about the ability of elected government to regulate healthcare—Latour asks academics to rethink the traditional assumption that an ethos of critique entails liberation. Given that attitudes of suspicion and detachment are just as likely to be used by our enemies to attack things we believe in as by our allies to attack things we hate, Latour asks academics to reexamine the utility of well-used critical tools. What has become of critique, we might wonder alongside Latour, in an era of feuding TV pundits and anonymous internet comment threads expressing attitudes of arrogance and dismissiveness rather than openness and engagement? What has become of critique in an age where people’s media consumption is determined by their affiliation with self-selecting enclaves of opinion that reinforce preexisting bias, reassuring people that their views are correct and that their opponents’ are wrong? What has become of critique when populist candidates in the American political context no longer hold sincere ideological convictions that require unmasking, but instead cynically adopt positions that bespeak an absence of principled conviction altogether?

The prevalence of arrogant and dismissive attitudes in contemporary society is directly related to another weakness of the present age: our impatience with reflection on the values we do hold. In the age of Twitter, the 24-hour news cycle, and populist politics, rallying cries are quickly formed through value-laden rhetoric that pays little attention to the features of experience it seeks to describe. For citizens of Western democracies, it has become routine to hear in recent years that defenders of health care reform are “socialists,” that defenders of immigration reform are “racists,” that Brexit will lead to “chaos,” or that globalization is equivalent to “totalitarianism.” Further exacerbating contemporary habits of unreflective evaluation are media outlets which, facing pressure to gain public attention in information-saturated markets, are pressured to simplify and sensationalize stories that cater to preexisting narratives rather than to provide the analysis of events necessary for informed value judgments.

In a contemporary political environment where dismissive and unreflective evaluations are widespread, Latour contends that efforts to cultivate attitudes and methods associated with critique in the humanities have become tactically inefficient. Latour summarizes the posture of “critique” as a tendency to reduce human attachments to one of two positions: either aggressively debunking such attachments as products of inflated subjective desires and unconscious indoctrination (the “fairy” position) or reductively explaining such attachments as products of discursive power structures or economic systems (the “fact” position) (2004: 237). He likens our now reflexive use of these two critical moves in the humanities to operations of mechanical toys “who continue making the same motion when everything around them has changed” (2004: 225). In a political environment where attitudes of suspicion and detachment spread

paranoia and block dialogue, Latour urges intellectuals to develop a new set of critical tools. Drawing from Heidegger's conception of "concern," Latour recommends that intellectuals in the humanities cultivate a critical ethos "whose import then will no longer be to debunk but to protect and to care" (2004: 232). Inspired by the object-oriented ontology of Graham Harman, to whom Latour's essay is dedicated, Latour describes this ethos as "stubbornly realist" in orientation—an approach that does not reduce human attachments to the two reductive positions of "fairy" or "fact," but instead strives to adopt a "fair" attitude toward objects of human concern (2004: 231, 243).

Latour's call to reimagine the humanities beyond the idiom and methods of critique has not gone unheeded. Over the past two decades, Latour's reaction against critique has received traction in literary studies where it has harmonized with internal attempts to reimagine the discipline in its ongoing turn away from Theory. Often inspired by the work of Bruno Latour and Paul Ricoeur, literary critics including Eve Sedgwick, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, Michael Roth, Michael Warner, Rita Felski, Heather Love, and Charles Altieri have all offered challenges to the ethos and methodology of critique while exploring alternative models of reading.³⁵ Within this diverse body of work, defenses of practices like "reparative reading" (Sedgwick 2003), "reading with the grain" (Bewes 2010), and "surface reading" (Best and Marcus 2009) have sought to reimagine versions of literary criticism at the level of affective stance, defending modes of close engagement with objects of human concern rather than antagonistic modes of symptomatic reading, or positivist modes of historicist explanation.³⁶ At the same time,

³⁵ See Knecht 2016 for an efficient summary of these debates.

³⁶ See Sedgwick 2003, Bewes 2010, and the sub-section titled "Embrace of the surface as an affective and ethical stance" in Best and Marcus 2009. For further analysis of how Best and Marcus's broad

practices like “object-oriented ontology” (Harman 2012) and “close but not deep” (Love 2010) reading have sought to reimagine literary criticism at the level of cognitive orientation, defending practices informed by objective analysis rather than by formulaic applications of theoretical constructs or reverent praise for literature’s ineffable otherness.³⁷

Rita Felski has introduced the concept of the “postcritical” to refer to an ethos that encompasses both of these ideals: combining an affective stance of openness and engagement with a cognitive orientation toward specificity and objectivity (2015: 12). As Felski defines it, the aspiration to be postcritical is not a desire to resist critique—“to reverse the clock and be teleported back to the good old days of New Critical chitchat”—but a desire to move beyond critique while incorporating its insights (2015: 5). For Felski, being postcritical in this sense requires avoiding lapses into “uncritical” modes of “impressionistic judgment” even as it requires adopting an ethos of “first-person implication and involvement” with one’s objects of analysis (2015: 151; 2009a: 31). Drawing from the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, Felski views phenomenology as a practice particularly suited to the cultivation of an ethos that is postcritical in both senses, combining an ethos of objective reflection with one of subjective care for objects of human concern.³⁸ Rather than either standing back from subjective attachments in favor of positivist explanations, or giving way to impressions of feeling unmediated by conceptual thought, Felski endorses a critical ethos that proceeds by identifying with a

conception of “surface reading” fits with these two postcritical tendencies toward affect and description, see McDonald 2015.

³⁷ See Love 2010 and Harman 2012.

³⁸ “Phenomenology ...express[es] itself in a care for phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness. To engage in a phenomenological description is ...to explicate the irreducible, meaning-bearing, and value-laden elements of our everyday practices” (Felski 2011b: 228).

first-person subjective attitude that is progressively refined through reflection on the fit of the attitude with its object. In keeping with phenomenological methods, this postcritical ethos requires the mediation of attachment by reflection, a modification of feeling by attention to the features of experience to which the feeling responds.

Other critics have taken up Felski's interest in phenomenology not only as a way to reimagine literary study at the level of method and stance, but as a way to justify the study of literary objects in the first place. Robert Pippin defends the practice of reading literature on these terms, arguing that objects of literary analysis, unlike objects of scientific research, "express a first-person or subjective view of human concerns" uniquely suited for facilitating phenomenological reflection (Pippin 2010). Along with Pippin and Rónán McDonald, Charles Altieri has also argued that works of literature are particularly well-equipped to enable a "phenomenology of valuing," by which readers reflect on non-instrumental modes of caring relevant to various practical forms of life (2015: 57).³⁹ For Altieri, engagement with literary texts like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* allows readers to experience "shifting from a distanced perspective to various models and levels of intimacy with aspects of the world," experiencing a sense of first-person involvement with, for example, "the way Charles eats, or Emma daydreams, or Homais brims with self-satisfaction" (2015: 58, 53). While readers' exposure to these various modes of caring does not necessarily shape their long term ethical values, such exposure can produce what Altieri calls moments of "valuing": momentary evaluative alignments with characters' perspective and practice that serve "as prelude[s] to what after repeated occasions might take shape as the values that govern what a person pursues" (2015: 47).

³⁹ Also see McDonald 2015.

Insofar as the study of literature routinely elicits various non-instrumental modes of caring for the choices made by fictional characters, such study serves as a particularly useful resource for cultivating a postcritical ethos championed by Latour and Felski: an ethos that is both subjectively invested in various practical forms of life and reflective about their objective features.

This recent turn to phenomenology in literary studies has the potential to offer literary studies the kind of justification it hasn't had since F.R. Leavis: a field-specific rationale for the study of literature that combines a social mission with specialized methods and objects particularly suited to its realization.⁴⁰ That is to say, in an era characterized by cynical detachment and dismissive rhetoric, the phenomenological study of literature promises the possibility of cultivating evaluative habits lacking in contemporary society: an ethos of care for objects of concern mediated by a reflective understanding of their features. Whether through "object-oriented criticism," (Harman 2012), "reflective reading" (Felski 2009a), "naïve reading" (Pippin 2010), "literary reading" (McDonald 2015), "reading with the grain" (Bewes 2010), "cultural phenomenology" (Connor 1999), "reading through the work" (Altieri 1983), or reading as "self-creation" (Rorty 1989), phenomenological methods offer opportunities to train scholars in habits of thoughtful evaluation necessary to become "explorers of the normative" rather than just "critics of normativity" (Roth 2010: B5).

If recent interest in postcritical methods has brought heightened attention to questions of how we read in literary studies, this body of work has not yet brought that

⁴⁰ See During 2015. For During, "It was in Leavisism that the discipline came to reflect on itself most confidently and subtly as well as to articulate its institutional procedures, its technical and pedagogical methods, and its social and cultural purposes most carefully, and, in the process, to make the most ambitious claims for itself (2015: 122).

same level of attention to questions of what we read. Although Charles Altieri sketched criteria for a “high canon” of texts useful for “shap[ing] and judg[ing] personal and social values” as early as 1983, Altieri’s general and wide-ranging defense of high literature has yet to be supplemented by more focused descriptions of literary works that share the specialized aims of postcritical reading (1983: 40). Even though the idea of “an encounter with a corpus of significant texts” remains one of the most intuitive justifications of literary study to academics and non-academics alike, defenders of postcritical methods of reading have done relatively little to select and justify a body of texts particularly suited to the cultivation of the ethos they defend (Felski 2015: 184). That is to say, the new postcritical literary studies lacks a canon: a tradition of texts distinctly amenable to promoting the attitudes of reflective evaluation championed by scholars in the recent phenomenological turn.

II. Phenomenology and the Realist Novel

Given that Latour describes the ethos he adapts from Heideggerian phenomenology as a “realist attitude,” it may be no surprise that I view the most promising aesthetic for cultivating a postcritical ethos to be a realist one.⁴¹ In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács attends to the way depictions of character in realist novels enable phenomenological reflection on intersections between value and fact. In a modern age where the significance of action is no longer self-evident, Lukács tasks novelistic characterization with the burden of uncovering relations between “the deeds,” or

⁴¹ My argument that realist novels are distinctively suited to cultivate reflective modes of “judging and valuing” is anticipated by Leavis’s choice to include exclusively realist works, many of which I also discuss here, in *The Great Tradition* (1950 [1948]: 30). My essay’s focus on the novel as a tool for postcritical reading is also anticipated by Timothy Bewes, who defends his phenomenological practice of “reading with the grain” as one “that is tied to the novel form, that recognizes the novel as part of its own formation, and that resolves to read, henceforth, alongside the novel” (2010: 4).

objective practices of individuals in the world, and “the soul’s inner demand for greatness,” or the subjective perspectives of individual minds (1971 [1916]: 30). For Lukács, novels that seek to emphasize unities between fact and value do so by depicting a central character’s attempt to perceive value in experience: a “problematic individual” who “journey[s] towards himself [on] the road from dull captivity within a merely present reality ...towards clear self-recognition” (1971 [1916]: 80). By depicting characters who seek to move from “dull captivity within a merely present reality” to experiences of “self-recognition” the novel is particularly well suited to enable readers to move “from matters of fact to matters of concern”—that is, to cultivate a critical ethos that does not criticize or explain away modes of value-laden attachment, but which seeks to create and justify such attachments, mediating objective experience and subjective values (Latour 2004: 225). Insofar as the realist novel “seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life,” the novel is a postcritical “descriptive tool” *par excellence*—one whose import is not only “to debunk but to protect and to care” (Lukács 1971 [1916]: 60; Latour 2004: 232).

As Lukács sees it, realist novels that seek to mediate fact and value do not only take from the constructive or reparative aspects of phenomenological reflection, but also from its critical and alienating aspects. For Lukács, the novel’s use of the problematic individual to reveal the inner value of experience is complemented by an antithetical impulse to reveal the failure of experience to measure up to values individuals seek to express. Rather than projecting a character’s values onto the world in an insular and subjective way, or depicting “a world which [is] beautiful and harmonious but closed within itself and unrelated to anything outside,” Lukács expects the novel to depict a

picture of life in which “irony” operates as “ethical self-correction ...determined by the work’s content” (1971 [1916]: 140, 84). The task of this ironizing correction is to do justice to the recalcitrance of real experience which so often thwarts the attempts of individuals to view it as imbued with value. In keeping with the Hegelian phenomenology that informs *The Theory*,⁴² Lukács assumes that unification between fact and value, or expressive reconciliation, cannot be something immediately posited, but can only occur through the mediation of the dialectical thought—a process that Hegel describes as the “way of despair” (Hegel 1979 [1807]: §78). For Lukács and Hegel alike, if authentic reconciliation is to occur—or if any “true, totality-creating objectivity,” is to be depicted—this can only happen after a character’s reconciling projections have been tested through alienating reflection on their failure to correspond with the objects such projections describe (Lukács 1971 [1916]: 93).⁴³

Insofar as realist novels interrogate correspondence between subjective valuations of characters and their objective experiences, such novels are particularly well-suited to promoting the kind of ethos that Latour associates with Heideggerian phenomenology: that is, an ethos that adopts a “fair”-minded and “stubbornly realist” attitude to objects of human concern (Latour 2004: 231, 243). In what follows, I use the Hegelian concepts of “reconciliation” and “alienation”—implicit in Lukács’s analysis of the novel form and in much subsequent scholarship on realism—to describe two contrasting rhetorical effects

⁴² In his later preface to the book, Lukács admits to having “become a Hegelian” at the time *The Theory* was written (1971 [1916]: 15). For more on the young Lukács’s Hegelianism see Miles 1979.

⁴³ Although Hegel does not always use the concepts of reconciliation and alienation explicitly in his own philosophy, two of Hegel’s more well-known statements about them can be found in 1989 [1817]: §194 and 1979 [1807]: §32, respectively. For discussions of Hegel’s conception of expressive reconciliation, see Beiser 1993: 36-41 and Taylor 1979: 1-3. For a lucid summary of Lukács’s stance towards the importance of alienation in *Theory of the Novel* see Sorenson 1979: 60.

that novels use to invite phenomenological reflection in readers.⁴⁴ “Reconciling” rhetoric describes moments where novels solicit modes of attachment in readers by uncovering successful mediations between a character’s subjective evaluations and their objective experiences, while “alienating” rhetoric describes moments where novels solicit modes of suspicion in readers by emphasizing distance between the two.⁴⁵ These two effects of reconciliation and alienation, I suggest, can each be mediated through three different techniques of characterization I call “articulation,” “enactment,” and “juxtaposition.” Corresponding loosely to novelistic discourse, story, and character system, “articulation” refers to a character’s expressions of value at the level of intention, “enactment” at the level of action, and “juxtaposition” at the level of relations to other values. Taken together, these techniques serve as criteria for inclusion in a canon of novels especially suited for postcritical reading. I will discuss each of these techniques in turn.

III. Articulation

⁴⁴ A connection between realism and reconciliation is implicitly emphasized in Percy Lubbock’s attention to the role novelistic form plays in producing meaning that reveals the value and significance of facts; Mikhail Bakhtin’s formulation of the way novels “collect the hero and his life and ...complete him to the point where he forms a whole”; Elizabeth Ermarth’s description of realism’s work in extracting unified meaning from the particulars of characters’ actions; and in Harry Shaw and Rae Greiner’s view of realism as a medium that produces a sympathetic going along with mental attitudes characters use to make sense of history (Lubbock 1945 [1921]: 18, 62; Bakhtin 1993 [1921]: 14; Ermarth 1981: 18-19; Shaw 1999: 218-265; Greiner 2012: 25-29).

Conversely, a connection between realism and alienation is invoked in Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of novelistic discourse that finds its object “enveloped in ...alien value judgments and accents”; in J. Hillis Miller’s attention to the way realist texts subvert characters’ attempts to impose totalizing meanings upon experience; and in George Levine’s description of realism’s fidelity to a world “where things are felt to be alienated from human activity” (Bakhtin 1981 [1935]: 276; Miller 2012: 49-51; Levine 1983: 12).

⁴⁵ The rhetorical effects of reconciliation and alienation are precarious achievements for Lukács, in tension with each other. On the one hand, novels seeking to promote reconciliation face the danger that their depiction of objective experience will not be sufficiently realistic to convey its capacity to resist subjective apprehension. In such works, an author’s “longing for ...dissonance to be resolved, affirmed and absorbed into the work” may “lead to a premature closing of the circle of the novel’s world” (1971 [1916]: 72). On the other hand, novelists attempting to do justice to the resistance of experience to understanding may compromise their ability to depict reconciliation; the danger of these cases is that “the fragility of the world will manifest itself so crudely that it will cancel out the immanence of meaning which the form demands” (1971 [1916]: 71-72).

A. *Reconciling Articulation*

The first technique that novels use to promote reconciling views of experience in readers is the articulation of values that explain the subjective significance of a character's practice. Although I take the term "articulation" from Charles Taylor, my use of this concept is particularly inspired by Richard Rorty's concept of "final vocabularies," or languages of value that human beings employ to describe their lives. Rorty explains:

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary." ...A small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible, and ubiquitous terms such as "true," "good," "right," and "beautiful." The larger part contains thicker, more rigid, and more parochial terms, for example, "Christ," "England," "professional standards," "decency," "kindness," "the Revolution," "the Church," "progressive," "rigorous," "creative." The more parochial terms do most of the work. (1989: 73)

Since Mikhail Bakhtin, the novel form has been identified with its inclusion of discourses that convey "specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (1981 [1935]: 292). Through dialogue and situated discourse, many novels

associate specific evaluative discourses with characters, effectively using value-laden language to articulate “final vocabularies” linked to particular points of view. Insofar as novels use language of thick, value-laden concepts to “justify” actions associated with a protagonist, they can be said to employ the narrative technique of reconciling articulation.

Let’s look at an example. George Eliot’s 1860 novel *The Mill on the Floss* concerns the practices of the impulsive protagonist Maggie Tulliver and of her stern and protective older brother, Tom. Maggie’s loyalty to a misunderstood friend provides an example of a practice the novel justifies to readers through articulation. As Maggie criticizes Tom’s unwillingness to understand her friendship with Philip Wakem, the disabled son of their father’s business rival, she uses an array of value-laden language to defend her behavior:

You have no **pity**; you have no **sense of your own imperfection** and your own sins. It is a sin to be **hard**; it is not fitting for a mortal, for a Christian. You are nothing but a **Pharisee**. You thank God for nothing but your own virtues; you think they are great enough to win you everything else. You have not even a **vision of feelings** by the side of which your shining virtues are mere darkness! (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 322, emphasis mine)

This passionate articulation of Maggie’s final vocabulary can be grouped into two kinds of concepts. I have underlined the relatively “thin” concepts Maggie employs like “Christian” and “sin[ful],” which communicate Maggie’s subjective evaluation but give little sense of objective practices corresponding to that evaluation; these concepts tell readers how Maggie feels while offering relatively little indication of what her feeling is

based on.⁴⁶ By contrast, the “thicker”/bolded terms above link Maggie’s evaluation to objective practices readers can identify. I have bolded the term “pity” along with its logical opposite “hard[ness]” because this value-laden concept corresponds to the practice of showing sensitivity to the suffering of others. Readers can observe the extent to which the thick concept of “pity” explains, and thus helps justify, Maggie’s actions, such as her decision to visit the socially ostracized Philip when he requests her company.⁴⁷ I have also bolded the negative value-laden concept of “Pharisee” along with its logical opposite (“hav[ing] ...a sense of your own imperfection”) because it corresponds to an objective practice of refusing to acknowledge deficiencies in one’s behavior. Maggie’s actions express a sensitive conscience that avoids pharisaical self-righteousness, for example, when she readily admits her failure to feed Tom’s rabbits or her decision to see Philip against her family’s wishes.⁴⁸ Finally, I’ve bolded the value-laden concept “vision of feelings” which corresponds to an objective practice of sympathizing with others. Readers can observe that Maggie’s actions demonstrate sympathetic awareness of Philip’s feelings when she avoids calling attention to his

⁴⁶ Thick description is an anthropological concept first used by Gilbert Ryle to name an account of action designed to clarify its significance to a cultural outsider. Ryle’s conception of thick description has been adopted and developed by an array of figures including Clifford Geertz, Charles Taylor, and Richard Rorty. My understanding of expressive articulation has been particularly influenced by the reference Taylor makes to thick description in *Sources of the Self*. See Taylor’s chapter “Ethics of Inarticulacy” in Taylor 1989 especially 77-80.

⁴⁷ Free indirect discourse situated to Maggie’s perspective clarifies that her eventual decision to continue seeing Philip is motivated in part by pity for “poor Philip, whom some people would shrink from only because he was deformed” (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 282).

⁴⁸ When a young Maggie forgets to feed Tom’s rabbits and they die, she offers a tearful apology (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 34). Years later, Maggie continues her habit of admitting wrong-doing to Tom, even when she disagrees with him: “I know I’ve been wrong,—often, continually,” she begins (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 322).

deformity,⁴⁹ when she remembers his past kindness to Tom,⁵⁰ and when she empathizes with his discontent.⁵¹

To the extent that thick concepts associated with Maggie like “pity” and “vision” coherently explain her actions, they help justify her behavior to readers. Insofar as novels like *The Mill on the Floss* use positive value-terms associated with a protagonist’s point of view (the “soul”) to explain corresponding objective practices (the “deeds”), these novels use articulation in a reconciling way: promoting attitudes of concern toward a protagonist’s practices by helping readers perceive unity between mind and world (Lukács 1971 [1916]: 30).

B. *Alienating Articulation*

If novels can use thick evaluative concepts to reveal the subjective significance of a protagonist’s practice to readers, they can also use such description to call that practice into question.⁵² I use the term “alienating articulation” to capture a narrative technique of associating a protagonist’s practices with values they do not express. In Henry James’s *The Bostonians* (1886), a central set of practices is associated with the feminist title characters, Olive Chancellor, Miss Birdseye, and Verena Tarrant, who participate in women’s movements of 1870s New England. Basil Ransom, an intelligent Southern

⁴⁹ “She had instinctively behaved as if she were quite unconscious of Philip's deformity; her own keen sensitiveness and experience under family criticism sufficed to teach her this as well as if she had been directed by the most finished breeding” (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 172).

⁵⁰ Early in the novel Philip agrees to tell Tom stories while his foot is recovering from an injury. Years later, Maggie remembers Philip’s kindness, telling him “I’ve never forgotten how good you were long ago to Tom” (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 277).

⁵¹ After Philip explains how his longing for beauty makes him feel alive and hints at his unfulfilled love for Maggie, the narrator emphasizes Maggie’s empathetic response: “Her heart began to beat with something of Philip's discontent” (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 280).

⁵² The presence of alienating articulation in a novel depends upon its inclusion of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia,” or languages of value formed according to “the intentions and accents of other people,” and it is related to the phenomenon Bakhtin calls “dialogization” (1981 [1935]: 298). See Bakhtin 1981 [1935]: 263.

conservative, pays a visit to his cousin Olive and ends up competing with her for Verena's affection. Following Lionel Trilling's reading of *The Bostonians*, it's possible to view Ransom as a vehicle for the novel to place the feminist practices defended by the novel's protagonists under critical scrutiny.⁵³ Using both thick and thin concepts, Ransom deploys negative evaluative language to describe the women's movement in a polemical exchange with Verena:

The whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is—a very queer and partly very base mixture—that is what I want to preserve” (James 2001 [1886]: 260).

Although *The Bostonians* is not always clear about the extent to which Ransom's views of the feminist movement should be taken as authoritative, this moment of articulation invites readers to use thick, value-laden concepts like “coddled sensibilities,” and “hollow phrases” to make sense of the practices of the novel's feminist characters. Just insofar as novels like *The Bostonians* employ negatively-valenced thick concepts to describe their protagonists' commitments and practices, such novels include alienating

⁵³ Lionel Trilling argues that Ransom functions as a dialectical “counterprinciple” to Bostonian feminist values in the novel (1980 [1955]: 99).

articulation. Alienating articulation invites readers to view the practices of central characters as dissonant with values that might render them significant.

IV. Enactment

If novels have the capacity to promote evaluative reflection on matters of concern by offering detailed descriptions of value-laden perspectives, novels may also think through such connections by depicting concrete situations in which values are expressed. I use the term “enactment” to capture the capacity of a literary work to communicate information about circumstances in which values are well or poorly manifested. Novels that articulate values do not always depict their corresponding enactment, and vice versa. In *The Bostonians*, for example, Basil Ransom enacts relatively few of the values he articulates. Although Ransom’s actions arguably do express values like “chivalry” and “gentleman[liness]” James does not imagine situations for Ransom to convincingly enact other values he articulates such as “sacrifice,” “honour,” or “endur[ance]” (2001 [1886]: 33, 249, 189, 260).

A. *Reconciling Enactment*

My thinking about enactment has been particularly influenced by the Aristotelian view of literature Martha Nussbaum advances in *Love’s Knowledge*.⁵⁴ The conditions for a character’s action to count as reconciling enactment can be clarified by three requirements, the third of which paraphrases Aristotle’s view of moral excellence:

- 1) action is *expressive*, or value-driven rather than situation-driven;

⁵⁴ See Nussbaum’s 1990: 148-168. Nussbaum’s work is influenced in turn by Wayne Booth’s Chicago-school revival of Aristotelian ethical criticism. For a helpful summary of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism and the ethical turn, see Phelan 2007.

- 2) action is *purposive*, or arises from conscious rather than unconscious motivations;
- 3) action is *phronetic*, expressing a value to the right degree, in the right circumstances, at the right time.⁵⁵

For an example of reconciling action in a novel that meets these criteria, one can consider Maggie Tulliver's greeting to Philip Wakem in *The Mill on the Floss*. When a young Maggie befriends Philip Wakem, a schoolmate of her brother Tom, she makes Philip a promise to remember him.⁵⁶ After several years, Maggie encounters Philip on a secluded walk and offers him the following greeting: "I'm very glad you came, for I wished very much to have an opportunity of speaking to you. I've never forgotten how good you were long ago to Tom, and me too" (2015 [1860]: 278). We can say that Maggie's greeting to Philip counts as a reconciled enactment of values to the extent that the action fulfills three criteria, above.

First, Maggie's greeting of Philip is value-driven rather than situation driven; greeting Philip as she does is not a choice that most people in Maggie's circumstances would have made. A merely polite, or even cool, response would be more likely given her brother's wishes, the reputation of Philip's family, Philip's physical appearance, and the indifference that would have been expected to develop through the years. But instead of responding only to external situational pressures, Maggie responds inwardly on the basis of values; Maggie's action expresses values articulated by the novel insofar as it is

⁵⁵ To respond "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is appropriate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence" (Aristotle, quoted in Nussbaum 1990: 156).

⁵⁶ "I shan't forget you, I'm sure," said Maggie, shaking her head very seriously. "I never forget anything, and I think about everybody when I'm away from them" (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 172).

“kind,” “[tender]” “sympath[etic],” and “faith[ful]”; responding to Philip, as Maggie reflects to herself shortly after, also helps her avoid negative expressions of these values such as “cruel[ty]” and “vindictiveness” (Eliot 2015 [1860]: 275, 209, 424, 281-82).

Second, Maggie’s greeting to Philip expresses consciously endorsed values, rather than unacknowledged impulses at odds with her purposes. The narrator does not encourage us to view Maggie’s initial greeting to Philip with the kind of skepticism, for instance, that Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) invites toward its protagonist when she makes her funeral preparations after being raped by Lovelace. Although Clarissa intends these preparations to express consciously held values like integrity and chastity, Richardson’s realism of presentation suggests the extent to which her actions also express narcissism and repressed sexual desire (see Watt 2001 [1957]: 231-234). The distance between value and act revealed in Clarissa’s funeral preparations contrasts with the expressive unity conveyed by Maggie’s greeting to Philip. Unlike Clarissa’s preparations for her death, or Maggie’s own decision to refuse Philip’s proposal later in the novel, Maggie’s greeting to Philip is presented as a purposeful expression of value, rather than as an accidental product of unacknowledged impulses.

Third, Maggie’s initial greeting happens in circumstances where adhering to values is warranted, rather than in circumstances where such adherence would appear as stubbornness, caprice, or delusion. Given the situation she is in, Maggie’s expression of belief and loyalty to Philip is justified. Unlike, for instance, the belief that Isobel Archer expresses when initially marrying Osmond in Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), or the belief that a younger version of Maggie expresses when giving money to a gypsy,

the degree and timing of Maggie's expression of belief in Philip is, in this case, appropriate to the circumstances.

B. *Alienating Enactment*

By portraying characters whose expressive actions do not fit with their circumstances, the enactment of values may also promote alienation instead of reconciliation. Gustave Flaubert's 1856 novel, *Madame Bovary*, is exemplary for its depiction of alienating enactment, or action which calls attention to the lack of fit between values and situations in which they are expressed. The novel's protagonist, Emma Bovary, expresses a sensibility that distinguishes her from the unimaginative and complacent inhabitants of a provincial French town through acts associated with religion, marriage, romance, and luxury. None of these practical spheres ends up providing a viable means for the expression of Emma's interiority, however. In instances when Emma's actions are purposive, they are rarely phronetic: the values associated with her perspective (like imagination, sensitivity, depth, refinement, and passion) fail to express themselves to the right degree, at the right time, or in the right circumstances. *Madame Bovary* is full of expressive enactment ill-matched to circumstances: Emma gives herself to religious raptures when her situation calls for discipline, she views her marriage with disgust when the situation calls for patience, she gives herself to passionate infatuation when the situation calls for skeptical restraint, she indulges in luxury when the situation calls for frugality. *Madame Bovary's* depiction of its protagonist's expressive acts promotes alienation insofar as Emma's circumstances either require a more moderate expression of her values, or the application of different values altogether.

V. Juxtaposition

If novels can communicate information about the fit between values and circumstances, they can also communicate information about the fit of values with each other. One way novels do this is through contrasts between characters who do and do not express given sets of values successfully. I use the terms “vivification” and “ironization” to describe rhetorical effects solicited by juxtaposition between characters whose actions express antithetical value schemas.⁵⁷ A novel uses antithetical character contrasts to promote reconciliation whenever it opposes a set of actions expressing one set of values (usually enacted by a protagonist) to another set of actions that fail to express that set of values (usually enacted by a secondary character).

A. Reconciling Juxtaposition, or “Vivification”

My thinking about reconciling juxtaposition is influenced by Alex Woloch’s description of relations between major and minor characters. In *The One Versus the Many*, Woloch offers Jane Austen’s novels as paradigmatic instances of works designed to communicate contrasts between inner character qualities.⁵⁸ The function of the Austenian “character-system,” for Woloch, is to juxtapose a protagonist’s expressions of value with those of surrounding minor characters in order to articulate a “valorized symbolic register” around a protagonist (2009: 47). For Woloch, contrasts drawn in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) between the novel’s major character, Elizabeth Bennet, and minor characters, such as her sisters, exemplify this technique of centralizing evaluative contrast. It is possible to view the kind of character contrast Woloch identifies in Austen

⁵⁷ For a sustained example of antithetical character contrasts in Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* see Matthew Flaherty’s “Henry James at the Ethical Turn.”

⁵⁸ Woloch credits Austen for transforming the novel “into a genre that abstracts, elucidates, and diagnoses human characteristics,” by “facilitating contrasts between inner qualities” (2009: 53). For Woloch, Austen’s preoccupation with such contrasts is explicitly foregrounded by her titles *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

as a narrative device that facilitates reconciling juxtaposition, or what I call “vivification.”⁵⁹ In the case of *Pride and Prejudice* we can say that expressions of Elizabeth’s value-schema are vivified to the extent that they are opposed with practices of other characters who conspicuously fail to express those same values. For instance, to the extent that Elizabeth’s perspective is defined by its investment in independent critical thought, that value is communicated through the juxtaposition of Elizabeth’s fine-grained judgments with the rigid conduct-book moralism of her sister, Mary. So too, if Elizabeth’s practice is characterized by spirited critical wit, this liveliness is vivified by its contrast with the compliant resignation of her sister, Jane.

Other examples of vivification abound in the nineteenth-century realist novel, especially in its British incarnations. In George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, Tom Tulliver’s rigid indignation clarifies the value of Maggie’s flexible generosity. In Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* (1857) the unctuous manipulations of the evangelical minister, Obadiah Slope, help emphasize the blunt integrity of the high church minister, Mr. Arabin. In George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893), the weak-willed compliance of Virginia Madden, an impoverished alcoholic, foregrounds the autonomous resolve of Rhoda Nunn, the administrator of a women’s school. One can speak of a relation between characters as “vivifying” when a novel uses character contrasts to make the value of an expressive practice conspicuous. In this way, competitive juxtaposition between practices function as a mechanism of communication, clarifying the significance of values that characters express.

⁵⁹ The contrast between Elizabeth and her sisters is Woloch’s. Woloch does not focus on the positive rhetorical function of such contrasts as much as on the pathos he sees in the transformation of human characters into “characteristics”—a process Woloch affiliates with the growth of market-driven practices of capitalist exchange (2009: 54).

B. *Alienating Juxtaposition, or “Ironization”*

A novel’s juxtaposition between major and minor practices need not always privilege a protagonist, however. I use the term “ironization” to describe the alienating influence of contrasts that privilege values expressed by secondary characters at a protagonist’s expense. The doctor who briefly appears at the end of *Madame Bovary* supplies one example of a character who plays an ironizing role. Flaubert’s doctor promotes ironization of Emma’s commitments to the extent that his dedication to others, incisive intellect, and self-control throw Emma’s narcissism, naiveté, and lack of discipline into sharper relief (Flaubert 2004 [1856]: 285). Other nineteenth-century examples of ironizing contrast can be found, for example, in the way that the contented humility of Pip’s adoptive father Joe Gargery, ironizes Pip’s restless vanity in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860), the way that the restrained candor of the scholar Vernon Whitford ironizes the polished manipulation of the aristocrat Sir Willoughby in George Meredith’s *The Egoist* (1879), or the way that the composed sophistication of the American expatriate Chad Newsome ironizes the scattered naïvete of the Massachusetts provincial Lambert Strether in Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* (1903).

Minor characters need not have exclusively vivifying or ironizing relations to a protagonist’s practice, but can actually serve both functions. For example, although Tom Tulliver’s weaknesses in sympathy vivify Maggie’s commitments in *The Mill on the Floss*, Tom’s strengths in dutifulness also ironize them. Insofar as Tom’s practical responsibility emphasizes Maggie’s relative lack of decisiveness, resolve, and discipline, the novel’s depiction of Tom’s practice facilitates both ironization and vivification. The particular use of character juxtaposition to convey tensions between antithetical value-

schemas is not strictly limited to novels that articulate values, or even novels that enact values in realistic circumstances. One can observe dually vivifying and ironizing character contrasts in texts as disparate as Sophocles's *Antigone* (441 B.C.), where Creon's rational governance opposes Antigone's emotional piety; Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), where the Don's idealistic chivalry opposes Sancho Panza's skeptical practicality; Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), where Edgar Linton's accommodating refinement opposes Heathcliff's assertive vitality; and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), where Kurtz's ruthless control opposes Marlow's sensitive observation.

VI. The Expressive Realist Canon

Let us gather the set of texts that use techniques of articulation, enactment, and juxtaposition into an informal canon of "expressive realism." The relation of any given text to this aesthetic is one of degree and not essence, since works of art can be distinguished in centrality to this aesthetic for generic, qualitative, and technical reasons.

First, many works of art are composed according to generic constraints that do not require a central character's actions to be value-expressive. Both adventure novels and naturalist novels, as different as they are, tend to depict characters whose actions are predominantly technical rather than expressive. To the extent that heroes of these genres possess distinctive traits, they tend to flow from their possession of unique skills (in the adventure novel), or basic passions and drives (in the naturalist novel), rather than from unusual commitments to values whose full appeal and dangers are unlikely to be recognized by those who haven't read the novel. Insofar as characters in these genres tend to maintain widely understood and thus unproblematic loyalties to family, loved

ones, country and so on, the protagonists of such novels do not tend to be the kind of problematic individuals seeking self-recognition that Lukacs associates with the novel form.

If works of literature may fall outside an expressive realist aesthetic for generic reasons, they may also fall outside the aesthetic for qualitative reasons, based on the success with which a given work communicates its evaluative vision to readers. While this second criterion is necessarily subjective, readers routinely invoke it whenever they feel disjunction between an implied author's evaluation of a character's experience and the valuation they actually feel when reading a work. As Altieri summarizes: "There are no guarantees that [a novel's] efforts at valuation will be rewarded on any given occasion. Even beloved texts or writers sometime just seem incapable of singing" (2015: 47). Wayne Booth also calls similar attention to the qualitative dimension of rhetoric when he recounts his experience reading polemical passages in D.H. Lawrence only to find himself "smiling when [he] should be panting, scoffing when [he] should be feeling awe" (1983: 138). While Booth leaves open the possibility that readers' initial evaluative disagreements with an implied author may change over time, we can nevertheless make a provisional qualitative distinction between works of art that succeed and fail in making their reconciling or alienating views of experience compelling to discerning readers.⁶⁰

Finally, a work of art's proximity to the expressive realist aesthetic can also vary for technical reasons, as works differ widely in their intent to use reconciling and

⁶⁰ In *The Company We Keep*, Booth introduces the term "coduction" to describe the process of comparison and reflection by which readers' own feelings and judgments may gradually align with, or depart from, those invited by an author's rhetoric (69). As anecdotal examples of coduction, Booth recounts his own experience of gradual alignment with D.H. Lawrence's rhetoric in *Women in Love* as well as his experience of increasing opposition to Mark Twain's rhetoric in *Huckleberry Finn*.

alienating effects as well as in the degrees to which they use articulation, enactment, and juxtaposition to convey them. On one end of the spectrum, some novels employ exclusively reconciling techniques when depicting the practices of central characters: for instance, the depictions of Uncle Tom's compassionate self-denial in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) or of John Galt's rationalistic self-assertion in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) are almost uniformly positive. On the other end of this spectrum, novels may also employ techniques of alienation while making relatively little effort at reconciliation: the depiction of Sir Willoughby Patterne in George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879), or of the indolent title character of Machado de Assis's *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1881) exemplify this latter tendency. If novels vary in their ambition to depict characters with reconciling and alienating effects, they also vary in the techniques they use to convey them. For instance, the depiction of Emma Bovary's romantic sensibility in *Madame Bovary* includes some reconciling articulation but minimal reconciling enactment, whereas the depiction of the Alyosha Karamzov's loving devotion in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) includes reconciling enactment but little reconciling articulation. The use of specific reconciling and alienating techniques can even vary widely between novels by the same author. For instance, although Jane Austen uses almost no techniques of alienation when depicting Elizabeth Bennet's spirited cleverness in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), she employs alienating enactment when depicting Emma Woodhouse's poorly-judged generosity in *Emma* (1815), and alienating juxtaposition when depicting the reserved Fanny Price alongside the theatrical Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park* (1814).

Having considered specific criteria for inclusion in a canon of expressive realism along with corresponding examples, we are in a better position to think through what an expressive realist aesthetic contributes to postcritical literary studies. We've seen that techniques of characterization employed by these novels are designed to elicit readers' valuations of various objects of concern: to join the "authorial audience" of expressive realist novels, readers must provisionally adopt various modes of feeling toward objects of experience (Rabinowitz 1977: 126). Without generalizing about the effects of such provisional identifications on empirical readers, we can say that valuations invited by expressive realist novels direct their ideal readers to an ethos that is postcritical in three senses: realist valuations invite engagement rather than detachment, criticism rather than reverence, and description rather impressionism.

First, expressive realist novels promote valuations that are engaged with objects of concern rather than just detached from them. Insofar as novels I've discussed depict experience in reconciling ways, they promote attitudes of attachment that extend beyond the predominantly negative affective registers that critics like Latour, Sedgwick, and Felski associate with critique. Expressive realist novels invite affective attachment to numerous forms of life: a female minister invested in fanatical evangelicalism (George Eliot's *Adam Bede*), an arrogant doctor who uses unproven techniques (George Eliot's *Middlemarch*), a stubborn traditionalist behind the times (Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*), an independent spinster who refuses to marry (George Gissing's *The Odd Women*), an eccentric tourist who neglects his commitments at home (Henry James's *The Ambassadors*), and a manic depressive who abandons his wife (Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Marriage Plot*). In the hands of a realist author skilled with reconciling techniques, lives

likely to be misunderstood by readers are associated with values that make such lives appear comprehensible and worthy of sympathy. Whether techniques of reconciliation promote socially oriented forms of “sympathy,” or supply individually oriented possibilities for “self-creation,” these techniques invite attitudes of investment, an ethos of care for objects of concern (Greiner 2012: 1; Rorty 1989: 88). That is to say, by including techniques of reconciliation, expressive realist novels promote attitudes that extend beyond the “paranoid” affective register of critique and encompass “reparative” modes of attachment, investment, and hope (Sedgwick 2003: 138, 150). Instead of exclusively rehearsing “vigilant, wary, [and] mistrustful” attitudes, techniques of reconciliation also invite affective modes of “inspiration, invention, solace, recognition, ...[and] passion” (Felski 2015: 188, 17).

In addition to promoting an ethos of engagement with objects of concern, expressive realist novels also invite attitudes that are critical and self-conscious rather than merely reverent or pious. Insofar these novels use techniques of alienation, their content pushes back against overly ingenuous or one-sided modes of attachment and belief. Novels that depict central characters with techniques of alienation, like Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, or Henry James’s *The Bostonians* make it difficult for readers to adopt uncritical attitudes of devotion to ideals, whether these ideals are associated with marriage, literature, religion, class, or politics. So, too, novels may use alienating techniques to promote critical attention to the social costs of various forms of life, such as those practiced by overzealous disciplinarians (Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*), manipulative patricians (George Meredith’s *The Egoist*), or philandering young gentlemen (Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now*). In the process of joining the

authorial audience of novels like these, it becomes difficult for readers to adopt the “uncritical” attitudes of “fundamentalists” or “ideologues” (Warner 2004: 15); rather than exclusively cultivating attitudes of “reverence” or eliciting “sentimental effusion,” the valuations elicited by expressive realist novels also cultivate attitudes of critical distance in readers (Felski 2015: 29, 151).

Finally, if expressive realist novels invite evaluations that are critical rather than reverent, they also invite evaluations that are descriptive rather than impressionistic. Insofar as expressive realist novels use techniques of articulation, enactment, and juxtaposition they do not just promote subjective attachment to values but objective analysis of them. By showing readers how values are articulated in conceptual language, enacted in concrete circumstances, and juxtaposed alongside opposing values, expressive realist novels invite readers to reflect on the evaluative commitments a novel depicts. Expressive realist novels that use techniques of articulation share the task that Rónán McDonald assigns to phenomenological criticism—the task of bringing values out from experiences of subjective immediacy and “into the domain of the concept” (2015: 248). So too, novels that use techniques of enactment invite readers to cultivate Aristotelian ethical wisdom, or *phronesis*, by reflecting on circumstances that constrain the applicability of virtues characters express. Finally, novels that use techniques of juxtaposition also invite readers to cultivate Hegelian self-consciousness by attending to the way that the significance of a character’s expression depends upon its dialectical relations to antithetical expressive modes. By promoting conceptual thought, Aristotelian *phronesis* and Hegelian self-consciousness in these ways, expressive realist works are well-placed to cultivate forms of “practical knowledge and self-understanding” in readers

(Pippin 2010). That is to say, expressive realist novels are not just objects we read: they are also objects that teach us how to read and think, modeling a mode of phenomenological thought that mediates evaluation with understanding (Bewes 2010: 3). Rather than stirring up feelings through “impressionistic judgment[s],” or “idiosyncratic flurr[ies] of private associations,” expressive realist novels influence feelings through techniques designed to promote analytical thought (Felski 2015: 151, 178); instead of contemplating “imponderables like human experience or human nature,” or promoting encounters with “opacity and ineffability,” such novels cultivate an ethos of careful “description” attentive to objective features of experience (Love 2010: 377, 371, 375).

Insofar as novels in the expressive realist canon use rhetorical techniques to cultivate reflective value judgments in readers, they are distinctly well-suited to cultivate the postcritical ethos championed by critics in the recent turn to phenomenology. Rather than inviting static orientations of critical detachment or uncritical reverence, these novels invite open-ended engagement with objects of concern. I’ve argued further that such novels invite readers to participate in the phenomenological discipline of mediating subjective evaluations with conceptual thought. By conveying reconciling and alienating depictions of experience through techniques of articulation, enactment, and juxtaposition these novels submit value-laden views to the labor of the concept. To read alongside novels in an expressive realist tradition is thus to read postcritically, refusing stances of detachment and superiority that lead away from objects of concern and instead adopting stances of engagement and openness that lead toward them.

Chapter 2: Ethos and Judgment in George Gissing's *The Odd*

Women and Franco Moretti's *The Bourgeois*

I. Introduction

In recent years, the ethos of critique has come under fire from scholars seeking to move beyond the evaluative stances and methodologies associated with suspicious hermeneutics.⁶¹ Rita Felski's recent book, *The Limits of Critique*, introduces the term “postcritical” to describe widespread efforts from philosophers and literary critics to rethink the status of critique in the humanities and to imagine new alternatives to it. Although the term “postcritical” is recent, the concept merely gives a name to ongoing conversations in literary studies over the past two decades aligned against the limitations of suspicious reading. Defenses of practices such as object-oriented criticism (Harman), reparative reading (Sedgwick) surface reading (Best and Marcus), and neo-phenomenology (Felski) have all presented themselves as successors to now outmoded critical habits in recent years.

These attempts to rethink critique in the humanities have not been met without controversy. Many commentators have found aspirations to conceive of a postcritical humanities to be unpersuasive at best and critically uncharitable or ideologically compromised at worst. Some have seen defenders of postcritical reading modes as guilty of excessive schematism for reducing complex intellectual traditions and methodologies to straw targets.⁶² A second and equally serious objection to the postcritical movement in

⁶¹ For summaries, see Felski 2015, Knecht 2016, and MacDonald 2015.

⁶² Rónán McDonald voices a version of this objection. As he puts it: “Oedipal polemical interventions are prone to reduce their targets to caricature. The recent turn against ‘critique’ sometimes homogenizes a

literary study is a worry over what seems like a lack of descriptive rigor: a concern that an effort to become ‘postcritical’ is synonymous with resignation to becoming uncritical, entailing a loss of more rigorous modes of analysis associated with critique. The turn to affect pioneered by Eve Sedgwick’s defense of “reparative reading” and the resistance to depth hermeneutics championed in Best and Marcus’s “surface reading” have done little to allay fears that postcritical movements aim to substitute the emotivism of a belletristic tradition for what appeared to be the gain in analytical rigor associated with critique.⁶³ Worries about the loss of analytical rigor in literary studies are exacerbated by the fact that most prominent defenses of postcritical humanities are pitched at such a high level of generality—in calls for turns to aestheticism, affect, surfaces, or hermeneutics—that they leave unclear the extent to which postcritical modes of judgment actually differ from those associated with “critique,” as well as the extent to which cultivating these different modes of judgment is desirable or even possible.

This chapter is designed to bring clarity to the question of how modes of judgment associated with critique differ from modes of judgment championed in ongoing postcritical conversations. By way of systematically comparing modes of judgment invited by two texts—one critical text I use to exemplify the stance of critique and one novel that I use to exemplify a stance of postcritique—the chapter draws out points of contact and departure between a tradition of symptomatic criticism and the tradition of postcritical phenomenology which I outlined in Chapter 1. To this end, I examine Franco Moretti’s recent work of critique, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*,

wide range of criticism, from dialectical Marxism to race theory to queer studies, under the banner of the hermeneutics of suspicion” (239).

⁶³ For arguments that critique the lack of descriptive rigor associated with defenses of postcritical reading methods see Warner 17-18, MacDonald 235-249, and Knecht 2016.

alongside a masterpiece of Victorian realism, George Gissing's *The Odd Women*, in order to compare and contrast two of the different orientations to bourgeois cultural practices that they invite. The ideal readers constructed by Moretti and Gissing's texts, I argue, share important sensibilities at the level of ethos: both texts invite readers to adopt a demystified rather than reverent stance toward bourgeois practices and to take an objectively descriptive rather than subjectively impressionistic view of such practices. While both Moretti's study and *The Odd Women* both cultivate modes of judgment associated with critique in these ways, they also depart from each other in important respects. I argue that *The Odd Women* promotes judgments of bourgeois practices in ways that are situated rather than abstract and charitable rather than condemning. This chapter thus presents specialized works of realism like *The Odd Women* as a tool for cultivating postcritical modes of judgment that do not discard the legacy of critique but which instead incorporate some of its virtues while also pressing beyond some of its limitations.

II. Suspicious Reading and Bourgeois Culture

Franco Moretti's recent study of realism *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*, takes the methodological assumptions of symptomatic reading as its starting point. In *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski describes the method of symptomatic reading thus:

Symptomatic reading [is] an influential blend of Freudian, semiotic, and political (often Marxist) theory developed by Macherey (1975), Jameson (1981), and others. Here psychoanalytical categories such as repression and the unconscious are applied to the relationship between a literary text

and a larger social world; the text is held to be symptomatic of social conditions that it seeks to repress but to which it nevertheless unwittingly testifies” (Felski 2011: 22-23).

Analyzing literary works that coincide with the onset of capitalist modernization in Europe, Moretti’s *The Bourgeois* mines 18th and 19th century literature for what its forms betray about the underlying conditions of capitalist modernity in its infancy. Viewing literature as “the fossil remains of what had once been a living and problematic present,” Moretti’s study looks for clues in literary form that help reveal the conditions of a society riven by “the spasms of capitalist modernity” (13-14). Seeking to analyze the new form of life that evolved in conjunction with capitalist modernity, Moretti brings bourgeois culture into focus by attending to a realist prose style, bourgeois character types, and value-laden keywords such as usefulness, efficiency, earnestness, comfort, and *roba* (or stuff), that gradually emerge in 18th and 19th century literature. Through discussion of literature in a predominantly realist tradition such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *North and South*, and *John Halifax: Gentleman*, Moretti’s study places bourgeois culture under scrutiny so that readers can freshly perceive its compromises and contradictions—for instance, the contradiction bourgeois culture faced in reconciling “the ascetic imperative of modern production” along with “the desire for enjoyment of a rising social group” (Moretti 51).

Although *The Bourgeois* is not exactly typical as a work of symptomatic criticism and is perhaps too recent to be methodologically influential, the study has particular utility as a tool to think about the strengths and limitations of critique. First, *The Bourgeois*, like the rest of Moretti’s scholarship, is particularly explicit about questions of scholarly methodology. Something of a dialectical provocateur in literary scholarship,

Moretti's method of reading in *The Bourgeois* takes the protocols of symptomatic reading to an extreme in ways designed to clarify its limitations as much as to inspire new modes of thought.⁶⁴ In addition to being especially self-conscious about the strengths and limitations of its methodology, *The Bourgeois* is also unusually self-conscious and explicit about the ethos underwriting its own critical intervention. Because *The Bourgeois* adeptly articulates its own value-laden critical ethos in ways that serve as standards by which to measure expressions of bourgeois culture—evaluating and not just describing the cultural forms it discusses—the study is a particularly helpful tool for analyzing the modes of value-judgment cultivated by critique.

In what follows, I focus on four characteristics of critique that shape Moretti's judgments of bourgeois cultural practices and forms. My goal in this discussion is both to draw out the ongoing appeal of the critical mode employed in Moretti's study and to clarify some of its limitations. My headings are:

Critique demystifies

Critique describes

Critique negates

Critique abstracts

I will discuss each of these in turn.

A. *Critique Demystifies*

⁶⁴ Julie Orlemanski makes this point about Moretti's polemical attention to questions of method: "Moretti ... acts as a kind of dialectical catalyst, insofar as he pushes constitutive tensions within literary study toward a point where opposed forces — say, "discovery" and "intervention," or literary history and literary criticism, or explanation and interpretation — have the potential to transform one another as well as transform the situation of their relation" (222).

Critique is a mode of analysis that resists enchantment. Refusing the allure of common sense conviction and the enthusiasm of pious devotees, critique sets itself in opposition to unselfconscious investments and unreflective commitments. Rather than cultivating attitudes of “reverence” or eliciting “sentimental effusion” for its objects, critique cultivates distance from them, bracketing enthusiasm and championing detached vigilance (Felski, *Limits* 29, 151).

The *Bourgeois* clarifies its own investment in an ethos of demystification through its critique of the Victorian desire to ignore unpleasant truths. Moretti views a fastidious reviewer of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* as exemplifying the Victorian tendency to preserve faith in cherished objects at the expense of self-deception. When an anonymous reviewer complains of Ibsen’s unfortunate habit of “dragging evils which we know to exist ...into the light of common day,” Moretti comments: “What is ‘unfortunate’ here—the fact that certain evils exist, or that we are made to know that they exist? Almost certainly the latter. Disavowal” (110). By indicting the Victorian tendency to “disavowal,” Moretti’s study casts its lot with an ethos of critique that resists modes of uncritical reverence and sentimentality. Rather than expecting art to preserve a halo of significance around ideals associated with domesticity and family, for instance, Moretti values art and criticism which refuse the allure of enchantment, sternly measuring ideals against the realities that betray them.

Moretti associates tendencies toward mystification and sentimentality with realist novels whose “deepest vocation,” as he puts it “lies in forging compromises between different ideological systems” (93). Committed to an ethos of demystification, Moretti’s readings of novels in the study work to unravel various contradictions and compromises

they broker between ideological systems. In a discussion of the popular mid-century Victorian novel *John Halifax: Gentleman*, for instance, Moretti presents the novel's idealized picture of reconciliation between workers and industrialists as a screen masking the underlying inequality of the wage-labor contract.⁶⁵ Another reading of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* unravels unresolved tensions in the behavior of the title character who is divided between an irrational ethos of acquisition by force and more typically ethical bourgeois habits of self-restraint. As Moretti puts it: "This coexistence-without-integration of opposite registers ... is clearly a flaw of the novel. But, just as clearly, the inconsistency is not just a matter of form: it arises from the unresolved dialectic of the bourgeois type himself, and of his two 'souls': suggesting, contra Weber, that the rational bourgeois will never truly outgrow his irrational impulses, nor repudiate the predator he once used to be" (35). Rather than ignoring the novel's depiction of unacknowledged dissonance between Crusoe's habits of violent exploitation and his bourgeois ideals of rational self-discipline, Moretti's reading invites his readers to adopt demystified judgments of the contradictory impulses fostered by capitalist societies. To join the authorial audience of *The Bourgeois*, one must be willing to view bourgeois ideals of rationality and equitability in this demystified way: that is to say, one must learn to see bourgeois values outside the halo of mystification promoted by novels like *Robinson*

⁶⁵ Quoting a study of capitalistic culture by Ellen Wood, Moretti summarizes the novel's attempt to imagine resolution to the realities of class conflict through the chivalric ethos of its title character: "How can industrialists secure their workers' consent? The novel's answer, in line with the '*déjà-là*' of Boltanski and Chiappello, explains Halifax's hold on the workers with his adoption of pre-capitalist values; specifically, of that 'patriarchal conception of the master-servant relation' to which nineteenth-century capitalism gave 'a new lease of life, as the most readily available and adaptable ideological support for the inequality of the wage-labour contract.' Master and servant: thus begins the metamorphosis of the one-sided bourgeois into a hegemonic gentleman. The paternalism of the master, who promises to take care of the workers' entire life" (119-120).

Crusoe and instead learn to acknowledge the extent to which they are contradicted by the imperatives of capitalist society.

While it's easy to imagine scholars quibbling over the details of Moretti's readings, it is difficult to imagine anyone seriously disagreeing with the ethos of demystification that motivates them. For Michael Warner, the habits of demystification have become something we reflexively teach our students: the imperative to read critically rather than adopting the "uncritical" attitudes of "fundamentalists" or "ideologues" has become "the folk ideology of a learned profession" (Warner 15, 14). As Terry Eagleton puts it, "no reversion to a serene, optimistic human faith is possible after Marx, Freud and post-structuralism" (160). For better or worse, the feelings expressed by the anonymous Victorian reviewer of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* are wholly alien to the culture of professional literary criticism after critique. The demystifying impulses of suspicious reading have inescapably changed the kinds of judgment valued in contemporary literary studies: rather than feeling distaste for literature and criticism which "drags evils ...into the light of day," contemporary literary critics tend to view skills of demystified judgment as an ethos worthy of cultivation.

B. *Critique Describes*

In addition to its emphasis on demystification, critique can also be characterized by an emphasis on description. For post-structuralists, Marxists, and New Critics alike, methods of critical reading are defined by being "reflective" and "analytic" in opposition to the "reverie" and "sentimentality" of uncritical reading (Warner, 15). That is to say, in contrast to modes of reading dependent on "subjective effusion or an idiosyncratic flurry of private associations," critical modes of reading require intellectual rigor and

conceptual thought (Felski 2015: 178). Heather Love describes this aspect of critique as an ethos of “description”: rather than “truck[ing] with imponderables like human experience or human nature,” or attending to “the opacity and ineffability of the text,” descriptive modes of critique employ categories of thought that make objective analysis possible (377, 371).

Love approvingly cites Moretti’s work on distant reading as an example of the descriptive turn; although *The Bourgeois* is far from a typical example of distant reading, Moretti’s discussion of Matthew Arnold in *The Bourgeois* clarifies that study’s investment in the ethos of description. Criticizing the reliance of Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* on “vapid formulas” such as “sweetness and light,” or “wisdom and beauty,” Moretti takes issue with Arnold’s apparent inability to present his analysis of culture in a mode of conceptualized analysis:

Beauty, sweetness, light, perfection, poetry, religion, reason, the will of God ... What is this? ... a way of asserting the fundamental and immutable unity of culture. What is beautiful has to be also good and holy and true. ... The result is that culture must not be a profession. This is the source of the fog that pervades every page of *Culture and Anarchy*: the ease and grace of the dilettante, drifting among great human values, without stooping to those mechanical definitions a professional would be bound to give. (142-143)

In this short polemic, Victorian “fog” is not the result of a willful denial of unpleasant truths, but simply the fuzzy thinking of the “dilettante”: that is, a mode of thinking inspired by the subjective impulses of the critic who “drift[s] among great human

values,” without making use of “mechanical definitions” necessary to translate his subjective impressions into the domain of the concept. Moretti indicts other Victorians along with Arnold for what he sees as their failure to describe reality with critical acuity. For example, Moretti offers a persuasive critique of the end of Elizabeth Gaskell’s industrial novel, *North and South*, whose forced conclusion relies on fuzzy ideas of mutual “influence” and “intercourse” as an imagined solution to conflicts between workers and capitalists (123). For Moretti, the failure of this novel to endow these concepts “with an intelligible meaning” is partly a deficiency of description, a failure to give the more rigorous definitions that professional criticism would require (125). For Moretti, the “fog” promoted by Victorian authors like Arnold, Gaskell, and Joseph Conrad arises from their digressive and emotional presentation of bourgeois ideals—a reliance on “vagueness” and impressionism, which allows their work to spread “a virtuous patina over the harsher reality of social relations” (124).

In direct contrast to Victorian authors who allow emotion to supersede conceptual rigor, Moretti praises more prosaic authors such as Ibsen, whom he credits for “reveal[ing] with absolute clarity the unresolved dissonance of bourgeois life” (178). Moretti names the literary ideal that Ibsen embodies “prose” and views it as the central achievement of bourgeois literature and a foil to the fog of Victorian camouflage. For Moretti, Nora’s closing speech in Henrik Ibsen’s *Dollhouse* is exemplary for embodying this ethos of prosaic sobriety. He says:

By now, readers of this book know that prose is its only true hero. ...Prose as analysis, first of all; Hegel's 'unmistakable definiteness and clear intelligibility', or Weber's 'clarity'. ... It is Ibsen's idea of freedom: a style

that understands the delusions of metaphors, and leaves them behind. A woman who understands a man, and leaves him behind. Nora's dispelling of lies at the end of *Dollhouse* is one of the great pages of bourgeois culture: on a par with Kant's words on the Enlightenment, or Mill's on liberty. (181)

Moretti's praise for Ibsen makes visible the positive standard that informs his judgments of Victorian fog: "analysis," "clarity," "intelligibility," and "definiteness" are the hallmarks of the bourgeoisie's finest literary achievements.

The ethos of description Moretti describes here is one that, like the ethos of demystification, modern critics tend to share. To the extent this ethos of description has shaped the profession, literary critics tend to appreciate cultural and ideological investments that are "fortified by thought" above vague, impressionistic language whose meaning is undecipherable. As such, literary depictions of commitments like Nora's in *Dollhouse* may be compelling to contemporary critics to the extent that such depictions give voice to prosaic ideas, using intelligible concepts to articulate intuitive commitments.

While I expect many critics to share an appreciation for the ethos of demystification and description championed in Moretti's study, the next two elements I associate with the ethos of critique Moretti employs are more controversial. Rather than functioning as widely accepted critical ideals, these next two characteristics of critique—negation and abstraction—can be viewed as limited or fallible opposites to more charitable and situated modes of judgment, respectively.

C. *Critique Negates*

Roland Barthes took issue with the stock mode of negativity that became commonplace in literary criticism in 1971: “Any student,” Barthes writes, “can and does denounce the bourgeois or petit-bourgeois character of such and such a form (of life, of thought, of consumption). . . . Denunciation, demystification (or demythification) has itself become discourse, stock of phrases, catechistic declaration” (qtd in Felski 2015: 75). The element of denunciation signaled by Barthes’s comment has come under fire in recent years by critics including Eve Sedgwick and Rita Felski who resist the narrow affective register associated with suspicious hermeneutics.⁶⁶

Although Moretti’s tone in *The Bourgeois* is not without moments of enthusiasm and positivity, the study’s symptomatic and historicist methodology invites readers to adopt a predominantly negative orientation to the object of bourgeois culture. By repeatedly measuring bourgeois culture and practices against unrealized ideals, the study frequently invites negative judgments. Consider Moretti’s skeptical view of the esteem in which bourgeois culture viewed the value of earnestness. Moretti contends that the bourgeoisie’s use of the word “earnest,” which supplanted the more neutral word “serious” in 1857, added an emotional halo of significance to modes of work whose real conditions were taxing: “The objective ‘seriousness’ of modern life— reliability, respect for facts, professionalism, clarity, punctuality—remained of course as demanding as ever, and it’s here that ‘earnest’ realized its little semantic miracle: *preserving* the fundamental tonality of bourgeois existence, mostly in the adverbial clause ‘in earnest’, while *endowing it with a sentimental—ethical significance*” (133, emphasis in original). As Moretti sees it, this “incrustation of value judgments over matters of fact” facilitated by

⁶⁶ See Sedgwick 2002 and Felski 2015.

words like “earnest” is the legacy of the Victorians who, hiding from self-consciousness, tended to obscure the realities of capitalist labor behind a fog of sentiment (130).

If Moretti’s historicist mode of critique invites readers to adopt a negative stance to the ethos of bourgeois earnestness, his critique also invites readers to adopt a negative stance to another important value term in bourgeois culture: the useful. Rather than focusing on the advantages and appeal of usefulness as an ideal, Moretti argues that the value placed on useful work in Defoe’s fiction “become[s] the new principle of legitimation of social power,” obscuring the otherwise arbitrary and unfair accumulation of resources through imperial exploitation (30). Moretti’s summary of bourgeois commitment to usefulness in the Victorian era is similarly disparaging:

An industrial society *needs* knowledge; but it only truly needs it *in so far as it’s useful*. That word, again: a battle-cry of Victorianism, from the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, to the industrialist’s words in *North and South* (‘any man who can read and write starts fair with me in the amount of really useful knowledge’), Newman’s *Idea of a University* (‘mental culture is emphatically *useful*), Bagehot’s feline touch on Scott— ‘no man had a more useful intellect’— and countless others. Following knowledge like a shadow, ‘useful’ turns it into a tool: no longer an end in itself, knowledge is briskly directed by the adjective towards a predetermined function and a circumscribed horizon. Useful knowledge, or: knowledge without freedom. (137, emphasis in original)

Moretti’s description of the value of usefulness paints a picture of the bourgeoisie as eager to instrumentalize the acquisition of culture. This passage effectively holds this

ideal at arm's length—defamiliarizing it with redescription (usefulness as “battle-cry” and “tool”), and with a narratorial aside (“That word, again”). Such rhetoric invites suspicion toward the Victorian bourgeoisie whose strenuous investments in values like usefulness (underscored by Moretti's italics on “*need*”), and later, efficiency, appear as artifacts of historical accident—or as “steps in the history of capitalist rationalization”—rather than as products of developing self-consciousness (41). That is to say, Moretti's description does not make the bourgeois commitments to values like “usefulness” and “efficiency” appear to be compelling ideals with continuing claims on the loyalties of his readers so much as accidental missteps that we are better off avoiding in the present. By criticizing the fog cast by bourgeois ideals in such moments, Moretti's account of the Victorians repeats well-worn moves of critique by debunking investments in bourgeois cultural ideals and practices.

While Moretti's study often levies negative judgments of bourgeois culture in this way, a few moments in his study also suggest an interest in a different critical ideal of generosity. During moments, Moretti's study presents elements of bourgeois culture in more charitable ways: not just as an ideological screen obscuring progress toward a future classless society, but as a rational form of life with continuing claims upon the present loyalties of his readers. In the introduction of *The Bourgeois*, Moretti suggests his aspiration to present bourgeois culture partly “as an incomplete project,” rather than a dead object of history, suggesting that the study will work to charitably make the case for the continuing appeal of bourgeois culture in the present (19). To this end, Moretti favorably contrasts the serious and prosaic bent of bourgeois culture expressed in texts like Ibsen's *A Doll's House* with what he sees as a “thinly disguised contempt for

emotional and intellectual seriousness” cultivated in present-day American culture (23). Moretti describes Ibsen’s prose style “that understands the delusions of metaphors, and leaves them behind” as “the true hero” of his book (181). By purposefully contrasting the present-day American preoccupations with mindless entertainment with an older bourgeois ideal of prosaic seriousness, Moretti’s study begins to cultivate judgments that extend beyond the predominantly negative register associated with critique. Although Moretti freely admits that *The Bourgeois* does not fully live up to this scholarly ideal of using knowledge of the past to critique the present,⁶⁷ the study’s partly unrealized impulse to “do justice to the achievements of bourgeois culture” harmonizes with Bruno Latour’s challenge for critics to cultivate attitudes of concern for cultural objects (181). By admitting the shortcomings of his own method of reading and by seeking in moments to move beyond them, Moretti expresses Latour’s desire for a mode of criticism that cultivates attitudes of concern rather than attitudes of skepticism, a criticism which gives readers “arenas in which to gather” rather than “lift[ing] the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers” (Latour 246).

D. *Critique Abstracts*

If critique tends to cultivate dismissive rather than charitable views of its object, it also tends to cultivate abstract rather than situated modes of judgment. Instead of making its own claims or judgments directly, critique adopts an abstract focus on “big pictures, cultural frameworks, [and] underlying schema” (Felski 2012). Thus, rather than arguing

⁶⁷ Moretti candidly acknowledges the unfulfilled ambitions he had for *The Bourgeois* in an aside which quotes Dr. Cornelius’s view of history professors from “Disorder and Early Sorrow”: “Like Cornelius, I too am a history professor; but I like to think that disciplined lifelessness may not be all I will be capable of. In this sense, inscribing *The Bourgeois* to Perry Anderson and Paolo Flores d’Arcais ...expresses the hope that, one day, I will learn from them to use the intelligence of the past for the critique of the present. This book does not live up to that hope. But the next one may” (23-24).

directly against practices of discipline employed by prisons or against specific modes of socialization associated with gender identity, for example, critique tends to argue against the underlying discourses that such practices employ. Seeking to excavate the underlying conditions for any judgments to be made, critique abstracts away from local critical engagements and normative interventions. By “insist[ing] on its difference from everyday practices of criticism and judgment” in this way, critique tends to focus more on abstract conditions of possibility rather than on possible future conditions (Felski 2012).

Moretti’s method of reading in *The Bourgeois* self-consciously gravitates away from a concrete focus on practical argumentation in favor of an abstract focus on epistemological structures. *The Bourgeois* tends to avoid direct modes of value-judgment associated with close reading in favor of abstract analysis of frameworks that make value judgments possible. By emphasizing relationships between bourgeois values and the underlying influence of the capitalist societies which gave rise to them, *The Bourgeois* steers away from more direct modes of judgment and argumentation that would aim to clarify practical alternatives to the bourgeois commitments and habits it discusses.

In recent decades, many commentators have insisted that critique, like any other language game, is inextricably embedded in practical forms of life and thus that critique’s tendencies to abstract away from practical arguments lead to incoherence and contradiction at the level of argumentative stance.⁶⁸ Amanda Anderson outlines this

⁶⁸ The ethical and practical dimensions of critique were especially foregrounded in well-known criticisms of Foucauldian philosophy, as commentators such as Nancy Fraser, Charles Taylor, and Jurgen Habermas placed Foucauldian critique under scrutiny for its failure to elaborate on any coherent “grounds of opposition to the modern power/knowledge regime” (Anderson 151). Foucault himself eventually corrected his own inattentiveness to the positive practical dimensions of critique in his much-discussed turn to ethics. As Amanda Anderson points out, Foucault eventually conceded that the task of critique should be a matter of practical and ethical judgment: that is, the task “to give one’s self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which will allow these games of domination to be played with a minimum of domination” (qtd in Anderson 150).

position in her introduction to *The Way We Argue Now*, which takes a stand against “the underdeveloped and often incoherent evaluative stance of contemporary theory, its inability to clearly avow the norms and values underlying its own critical programs” (1). Based on the premise that questions of ethos and practice underwrite all epistemological endeavors, Anderson contends that modes of critique frequently maintain an unclear relationship to the norms and values underlying their own linguistic interventions—a relationship which, in many cases, manifests in incoherence at the level of a critical argument’s evaluative stance.

Moretti’s study is perhaps atypical of the kind of critique Anderson describes in that the evaluative stance employed by *The Bourgeois* is quite developed. As we have seen, *The Bourgeois* evaluates its object through a coherent ethos characterized by demystification rather than reverence and description rather than impressionism: for the most part, the two values which underwrite Moretti’s critical intervention are clearly and consistently avowed throughout his study. Nevertheless, the abstract focus of Moretti’s study also makes it possible to discern points of tension, if not outright incoherence, between the various value-judgments implicit in his critical readings of bourgeois culture and literature.

Consider Moretti’s discussion of Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, which indicts Arnold’s text for failing to live up to an ethos of description. By emphasizing Arnold’s refusal to employ the “mechanical definitions a professional would be bound to give,” in favor of “the ease and grace of the dilettante,” Moretti presents Arnold’s text as offering vague and loose descriptions of cultural ideals that contribute to Victorian “fog” (143). In this moment, the practical valence of Moretti’s critique would seem to align

itself with an ethos that we might call “professionalism”: that is, the practical ability of someone to internalize the various skills, habits, and discipline necessary for doing a job successfully—in this case, the habits of a modern day cultural critic.

An earlier moment in Moretti’s study, however, endorses values directly contradictory to those expressed in this defense of professional cultural analysis. In a discussion of the way free-indirect discourse affects Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Moretti indicts professionalism indirectly. Summarizing D.A. Miller’s criticism of nineteenth-century narrative practices, Moretti writes: “Free indirect style is a sort of stylistic Panopticon, where the narrator’s ‘master-voice’ disseminates its authority ... It is a tolerant technique, free indirect style; but it’s the technique of socialization, not of individuality (not around 1800, at any rate). Elizabeth’s subjectivity bows to the ‘objective’ (that is to say, socially accepted) intelligence of the world” (99, 97). The carefully chosen rhetoric of Moretti’s description invites readers to adopt a negative judgment of the way in which realist novels affix their characters to flexible modes of “authority.” By emphasizing the social control effected by free indirect discourse—where one must “bow to” (rather than “grow into” or “internalize”) the requirements of “socialization”—Moretti’s rhetoric appears committed to a practical ethos of “individuality” and unrestrained “subjectivity” which is held to be endangered by the controlling requirements of socialization. A stance that places value on unrestrained individuality in this way, though, is practically incompatible with the stance advocated in Moretti’s earlier discussion of Arnold. *The Bourgeois* in this moment appears to want it both ways: criticizing the “ease and grace” of Matthew Arnold’s impressionistic effusions while also championing the individualistic voice of Elizabeth

Bennet's unconstrained "subjectivity"; advocating a "professional" discipline of cultural analysis while also resisting the controlling "socialization" effected in the realist novel.

Such fine-grained rhetorical analysis may seem to nit-pick, given that Moretti's argument is not particularly invested in these kind of local judgments and ethical interventions. Indeed, Moretti's ambitions in *The Bourgeois* are much more to describe underlying conditions of a form of life rather than to advocate for specific changes to it. But precisely because of Moretti's abstract focus on the bourgeois culture as a product of sweeping historical changes, *The Bourgeois* makes itself vulnerable to contradictions like this at the level of stance. Just insofar as Moretti's critique measures bourgeois culture against a shifting set of ideals without clarifying how those ideals might be better realized in practice, one can say that his critique of bourgeois cultural practice is unsituated. Moments of contradiction or tension in the evaluative stance invited by the study's rhetoric suggest that Moretti's study is vulnerable to the charges leveled at many works of critique—in this case, the accusation that critique measures cultural practices against a view from nowhere, a utopian standard which nurtures "mistrust of the routines and practices through which the everyday business of the world is conducted" rather than clarifying desirable changes in practical judgment (Felski 2012).

III. The Odd Women and Bourgeois Culture: Cultivating Postcritical Judgments

I've argued then, that Moretti's study invokes a critical ethos with specific features, some of which appear desirable to contemporary critics and some of which appear limited for their incompatibility with other modes of judgment. We've examined how *The Bourgeois* invites readers to evaluate bourgeois culture readers with modes of critical judgment that are descriptive, demystified, negative, and abstract. By using

rhetoric to call attention to blind spots, compromises, and contradictions in cultural practices of the bourgeoisie, Moretti's study invites readers to evaluate such practices with new eyes, perceiving both strengths and limitations of this form of life.

Insofar as *The Bourgeois* seeks to cultivate critical judgments of bourgeois commitments in its readers, its ambitions actually have more in common with Victorians like Matthew Arnold than might first appear. By inviting readers to perceive immanent contradictions in values professed by the bourgeoisie—between “enjoyment” and “ascetic[ism]” or between earnest conviction and objective description, for example—Moretti's dialectical method closely resembles the morally intelligent judgment championed by mid-Victorian liberals (Moretti 51). Indeed, Moretti praises Mill's thoughts on liberty, along Kant's reflections on Enlightenment and Ibsen's closing pages of *Dollhouse* as “one of the great pages of bourgeois culture” (181).

By inviting readers to adopt critical judgments of bourgeois values and practices, Moretti's study not only promotes the ideals championed by mid-century Victorian philosophers but also echoes rhetorical strategies employed by Victorian novelists. I argued in chapter 1 that realist authors such as George Eliot and Jane Austen used specialized techniques of characterization to promote liberal habits of judgment in readers. By depicting characters' expressions of value through techniques of articulation, enactment, and juxtaposition, these novelists invited readers to make reflective judgments of values expressed by Victorian cultural practices. I turn now to the work of another Victorian novelist, George Gissing, whose specialized depictions of character also cultivate critical judgments of the values expressed by the Victorian bourgeoisie.

Although Gissing's centrality to a tradition of liberal aesthetics is less established than the likes of Eliot or Henry James, Gissing had much occasion to incorporate liberal ideals of cultivated judgment into his fictional practice. In addition to being known in liberal circles by the likes of Fredric Harrison and Matthew Arnold, Gissing was personally acquainted with John Morley, the editor of the influential liberal Victorian publication, *The Fortnightly Review*. Gissing also learned much from the example of George Eliot, whose writings he admired and whose serious and intellectually-acute depictions of character he imitated.⁶⁹

While Gissing is perhaps best known for *New Grub Street* (1891), his 1893 novel *The Odd Women* is an exemplary achievement of liberal aesthetics: by employing a tightly constructed character-system of characters who do and do not express bourgeois values, the novel cultivates many-sided critical judgments of bourgeois values and practice. The protagonist of *The Odd Women* is Rhoda Nunn, an intelligent and hard-working bourgeois who runs a secretarial school designed to teach middle-class women the practical skills and discipline necessary for financial independence. The novel juxtaposes the self-reliance Rhoda teaches in her school and displays in her own life with the predicament of less fortunate women in the novel, including that of Monica Madden—a younger woman who decides to marry for financial security and ends up being controlled by her conventional husband, Edmund Widdowson. As Monica gradually finds herself stifled by her husband's serious temperament and paternalistic expectations, Rhoda works to teach women the practical skills necessary to avoid

⁶⁹ Although Gissing once praised Charlotte Brontë's writing above Eliot's, he admits in an 1892 letter to Eduard Bertz that he was once a "follower" of George Eliot. Critics have lent support to this influence, observing more points of resemblance between Gissing's fictional style and Eliot's than that of any other novelist, including Brontë and even Dickens (see Swinnerton 50-51; Korg 258-261).

financial dependence on men. Rhoda's focus on her school is later interrupted when she meets a cousin of her work associate, Everard Barfoot, a rakish aesthete determined to treat life as a holiday. Everard decides it would be a diverting challenge to make Rhoda fall in love with him and eventually succeeds in this task, only to surprise himself by falling in love with Rhoda's resolve and intellectual independence in the process. Everard and Rhoda end up disagreeing over the idea of whether to have a conventional marriage and soon after, a misunderstanding over Everard's relationship with Monica exacerbates their rift. Although Everard eventually explains his behavior and renews an offer of marriage on Rhoda's terms, Rhoda rejects his second proposal after deciding that his initial offer had been "not quite serious." The novel ends after Monica dies in childbirth and Rhoda decides to continue working in the school while raising Monica's child.

Because *The Odd Women* uses specialized rhetorical techniques to cultivate critical judgments of bourgeois character types—both Rhoda Nunn and Edmund Widdowson are serious, dutiful bourgeoisie who place a high value on work—the novel is particularly useful to compare alongside the critical judgments of bourgeois culture invited by Moretti's study. We've seen that *The Bourgeois* cultivates critical judgments that are demystified and descriptive, on the one hand, but predominantly negative and abstracted, on the other. In what follows, I contend that *The Odd Women* invites a different critical orientation to bourgeois culture in its readers—an orientation that presses beyond limitations of critique visible in Moretti's study while also preserving some of its strengths.

There is no way to qualitatively appreciate the many-sided judgments of bourgeois cultural practice invited by *The Odd Women* other than to read it closely: one

has to perceive moments when the novel's characters articulate and enact bourgeois values with close attention to the rhetorical effect invited by such moments. To the extent that readers of *The Odd Women* join the novel's authorial audience, feeling along with particular characters in accord with the novel's rhetorical purpose, they are invited to experience moments of both alignment and dissonance with aspects of bourgeois culture that characters express. My reading of *The Odd Women* examines scenes in the text where the speech and actions of Gissing's characters bear a significant relationship to bourgeois values and practice, inviting either positive or negative judgments in the process.

I begin by examining moments in the novel where the novel's rhetoric invites alignment with bourgeois values: that is, moments designed to promote positive judgments of bourgeois characters for their earnest, efficient, and useful behavior. By examining the way in which *The Odd Women* favorably contrasts the behavior of Rhoda Nunn with secondary characters who fail to enact the values she expresses, I aim to demonstrate two claims. First, I contend that the novel's rhetoric promotes judgments of bourgeois culture that are charitable: insofar as the novel imagines situations where bourgeois characters successfully express values alongside characters who fail to do so, the novel aims to reveal bourgeois culture at its most appealing. To join the novel's authorial audience in these situations, readers must view bourgeois culture as an unfinished project with continuing claims upon their present loyalties rather than a dead object of history. In addition to promoting charitable judgments of bourgeois practices, this first set of character-contrasts also promotes descriptive judgments of such practices. By inviting readers to view the practices of bourgeois characters through a vocabulary of

thick description that articulates the values these practices express, I argue that the novel cultivates conceptualized judgments corresponding to objectively identifiable actions rather than impressionistic evaluations corresponding to an observer's subjective feelings. To make a case that *The Odd Women* promotes charitable and descriptive orientation to bourgeois practices in these ways, I will discuss moments in the novel corresponding to judgments that bourgeois characters are earnest, efficient, and useful, respectively.

IV. Charitable and Descriptive Judgments in *The Odd Women*

A. Bourgeois culture is earnest

First, the novel's presentation of Rhoda Nunn's action and speech invites readers to view her as earnest. Rhoda and her work associate Mary Barfoot believe their work teaching secretarial skills to women serves a moral purpose, and they expect women in their school to pursue their own work with the same devotion. Describing their idealistic rather than instrumental approach to work in a speech, Mary comments: "I don't care *what* results, if only women are made strong and self-reliant and nobly independent!" In Rhoda's case, her seriousness about teaching women secretarial skills expresses Mary's conviction that the skills learned in the school cultivate the qualities of strength, self-reliance, and independence Mary describes. Rhoda pursues her work not merely with professional decorum, but with a genuine belief in its value, echoing the prevalent Victorian view of work as a vocation rather than mere duty. Rhoda's earnestness is manifested most significantly in the advice she gives to Monica Madden, who is newly pregnant and driven to despair after a failed attempt to escape her unhappy marriage. After initially refusing to extend polite sympathies to Monica, Rhoda eventually helps Monica by offering her a "counsel of earnest significance." By admonishing Monica to

avoid succumbing to despair and to “think bravely and nobly of [herself],” Rhoda’s expression of conviction in the ideals of the women’s school both challenges and inspires Monica, inciting her gratitude.

The Odd Women invites readers to adopt positive judgments of Rhoda’s earnestness in large part by making contrasts between Rhoda’s actions and those of characters who lack her depth of feeling. Monica Madden’s predicament is precipitated when she falls for a charming young musician, Mr. Bevis, who conspicuously lacks the earnestness Rhoda displays. Monica’s initial surprise that Bevis can appear “so much at ease” in conversation with others if he is truly in love with her is later justified when Bevis writes a letter attempting to excuse his refusal to follow through on their plan to run away: “with such conception of him his letter corresponded; it was artificial, lifeless, as if extracted from some vapid novel.” In contrast to the artifice and vapidness of Bevis’s letter, Rhoda’s earnestness appears a welcome contrast, indeed.

The irresponsible bachelor Everard serves as another foil character whose actions promote charitable judgments of Rhoda’s earnestness.⁷⁰ Everard’s romantic interest in Rhoda begins not as a serious pursuit of the heart, but as a matter of personal indulgence, based on his sense that “a contest between his will and hers would be an amusement decidedly to his taste.” Finding himself increasingly impressed by Rhoda, Everard eventually asks her to be his wife under the condition that they forego a legal ceremony. Although Everard’s attraction to Rhoda is genuine, the terms of his proposal are nevertheless designed as a game to test his power over her: if Rhoda were willing to compromise on her anti-marriage stance out of love for him, Everard would then view his

⁷⁰ For another take on the way Rhoda’s capacity for blunt expression is positively contrasted with Everard’s ironic insincerity in the novel see Chase.

triumph to be complete. Although Rhoda's own habitual sincerity initially leads her to misunderstand the terms of his proposal,⁷¹ Rhoda eventually corrects her error, observing to Everard that his feelings toward her lacked the serious quality of her feelings to him: "After all, the perfection of our day was half make-believe. You never loved me with entire sincerity. And you will never love any woman--even as well as you loved me."

Rhoda's statement emphasizes the contrast the novel draws out between the earnestness of the Victorian bourgeois and the irony of the Victorian dandy. Occupied with gratifying his own vanity and playing at experiments in love, Everard's lack of earnestness limits the range of his feeling, even to the point, the novel suggests, that he could "never love." Although Everard values Rhoda highly, his limited ability to invest seriously and sincerely in causes outside of himself leaves him impoverished in feeling by comparison. Everard's self-consciousness of this fact lends a note of pathos to the depiction of his contrast with Rhoda—as Everard eventually acknowledges to himself, "Rhoda's love had been worth more than his." In matters of the heart, an inability to achieve bourgeois earnestness may appear to be a sad thing. Readers who join the novel's authorial audience are invited to feel the significance of bourgeois earnestness by comparing Rhoda's behavior favorably with the actions of characters who lack this quality.

B. *Bourgeois culture is efficient*

Rhoda is not just distinguished from other characters in the novel for her earnestness but also for her efficiency. Monica's sister Virginia observes this quality in

⁷¹ "She believed him entirely serious. Another woman might have suspected that he was merely trying her courage, either to assure himself of her love or to gratify his vanity. But Rhoda's idealism enabled her to take him literally."

Rhoda, noting the gendered expectations that Victorians typically associated with this trait: “She is quite like a *man* in energy and resources. I never imagined that one of our sex could resolve and plan and act as she does!” The string of action verbs—“resolve,” “plan,” and “act”—emphasize the way in which Rhoda does not just make decisions, but does so as rapidly as possible, matching predetermined ends with energetic purpose. When Rhoda is later conflicted about her failed relationship with Everard, she continues to achieve the efficiency praised by Virginia: “[Rhoda] made a plan of daily occupation, which by leaving not a vacant moment from early morning to late at night, should give her the sleep of utter weariness. New studies were begun in the hour or two before breakfast.”

Although Rhoda’s strenuous regimen occurs as a partly defensive response to a personal crisis, Rhoda’s efficiency here actually appears far preferable in the novel to the alternative of postponing crucial decisions when it is time to make them. Much better Rhoda’s tireless efficiency than the Madden sisters’ wishful speculations about using their capital to open a school that never materialize into action⁷² or Bevis’s nervous and “unmanly” attempts to delay making plans when the time has come to run away with Monica.⁷³ Even such a “fine specimen of a man” as Everard Barfoot appears to his cousin

⁷² Rhoda’s view of the Madden sisters is quite unsparing: “And the elder ones will go on just keeping themselves alive; you can see that. They’ll never start the school that there’s so much talk of. That poor, helpless, foolish Virginia, alone there in her miserable lodging! How can we hope that any one will take her as a companion? And yet they are capitalists; eight hundred pounds between them. Think what capable women might do with eight hundred pounds.”

⁷³ When the time has come to run away with Monica, Bevis hesitates by saying that “in a few weeks it might all be managed very easily.” With narration situated to Monica’s perspective, the novel emphasizes Monica’s disillusionment in seeing Bevis’s “shaking voice,” “quivering ... nerves,” and “woeful perplexity”: “The unmanliness of his tone was so dreadful a disillusion. She had expected something so entirely different—swift, virile passion, eagerness even to anticipate her desire of flight, a strength, a courage to which she could abandon herself, body and soul.”

Mary to be a “poor, ineffectual creature” in comparison with Rhoda and her steely resolve.

C. *Bourgeois culture is useful*

If Rhoda’s behavior appears earnest and efficient to readers, it also appears useful. A pragmatist by nature, Rhoda understands the value of developing marketable skills in a capitalist society. Although the Madden sisters are “excellent creatures,” Rhoda is quick to place their excellence in context, noting that they are “useful for nothing except what they have done all their lives.” By contrast, Rhoda’s diligent work at the school—not only typing and instructing others but also practicing “shorthand, book-keeping and commercial correspondence”—ensures that she will remain independent and self-reliant in her career. Placing weight on the humble value of usefulness does not merely help Rhoda accommodate herself to economic exigencies; it is also a strategy for securing psychological well-being. When Monica comes to Rhoda for advice, Rhoda’s words of consolation hold this modest bourgeois ideal before her: “My dear girl, you may live to be one of the most contented and most useful women in England.” When Rhoda makes this connection between usefulness and contentment in her advice to Monica, she is drawing from her own experience. By considering the practical effects of her work on behalf of disenfranchised women, Rhoda finds “a sense of power and usefulness,” that arises from her awareness that she makes a practical difference by being of service to those around her.

As it does with the values of earnestness and efficiency, the novel also invites readers to perceive the significance of Rhoda’s useful behavior by contrast with the behavior of Everard Barfoot. Mary and Rhoda, busy with the work of their time, wonder

together over what they see as Everard's waste of considerable talent: "Does he aim at nothing whatever?" Rhoda asks. Rather than using his efforts to further causes that lead to practical change—such as the emancipation of the working class, which Rhoda and Mary take to be the "great sphere for men"—Everard's goals extend no further than a Paterian desire to take in the "the spectacle of existence," to refine his nature through observation of "an infinite series of modes of living." The contrast with Everard's unproductive anti-bourgeois practice is most apparent during a sequence that describes Everard's narcissistic preoccupation with his own self-refinement. Leaving the company of Rhoda and Mary to travel abroad, Everard shifts his romantic attentions to the comparatively graceful and placid Agnes Brissenden, whose "perfect simplicity of demeanour" provides food for his exploration of alternative modes of life. As Everard's discerning eye reveals Agnes's unassuming openness to be neither an expression of coy flirtation nor romantic submission, he feels his "masculine self-assertiveness" replaced by "a genuine humility such as he had never known." While this exchange appears at first to reveal Everard's desire to sensitively understand various modes of life, the reader's appreciation of Everard's development in values is disrupted by the unexpected intrusion of narratorial distance in his ensuing self-reflection: "As he sat conversing in one of these drawing-rooms, he broke off to marvel at himself, to appreciate the perfection of his own suavity, the vast advance he had been making in polished humanism." If Rhoda has an ideal of social usefulness before her, devoting herself to a cause greater than herself, the surprising intrusion of irony into the end of this passage presents Everard's aestheticism as a kaleidoscopic mirror that reflects back to him little more than variations on his own ego. Everard's humanism may be "polished," but it is unmistakably a humanism that

privileges individual reflection over political action, preferring the improvement of one's own "suavity," over improvement in the social order. No wonder that Everard's neglect of "the social point of view" is criticized by Rhoda and Mary for its "selfish" and "idle" implications.

By depicting characters who do and do not express bourgeois values of earnestness, efficiency, and usefulness, *The Odd Women* promotes charitable judgments of bourgeois culture. As we have seen, these judgments of bourgeois practices take shape through contrasts in the novel's character-system that work to clarify the objective occasions for each positive judgment: the novel juxtaposes Rhoda Nunn's concrete expressions of earnest conviction with Bevis's superficial charm and Everard's ironic gamesmanship, Rhoda's efficient resolve with Bevis's unmanly hesitations and Everard's willful idleness, and her social usefulness with the Madden sisters' unmarketable refinement and Everard's self-indulgent humanism. By following along with the positive and negative feelings invited by these contrasting modes of behavior, readers are invited to cultivate judgments of bourgeois practices that are both charitable and precise, matching positive subjective evaluations with specific objective situations that correspond to them.

V. Demystified and Situated Judgments in *The Odd Women*

After considering ways in which the novel promotes charitable and descriptive judgments of bourgeois cultural practices, I now want to consider moments where the novel promotes demystified and situated judgments of such practices. I will show that *The Odd Women* demystifies bourgeois practices by inviting readers to adopt negative judgments of two characters whose actions express some weaknesses of a bourgeois

ethos: Rhoda Nunn, whose behavior also displays bourgeois cultural ideals at their best, and Edmund Widdowson, the hapless husband of Monica Madden whose behavior reveals only the vices of bourgeois culture and none of its virtues. By inviting readers to critically evaluate moments where actions of bourgeois characters display traits of constraint, rigidity, and bluntness, *The Odd Women* cultivates demystified judgments of bourgeois cultural practices in readers. Such moments do the work of critique by measuring such practices against ideals they fail to express and inviting readers to perceive such practices outside a halo of sentimental significance. The novel's work of demystification in such moments is also complemented by a second tendency to promote situated judgments of bourgeois practices in readers: that is, judgments that measure bourgeois practices by comparison with a clearly visible positive alternative. By juxtaposing the constrained, rigid, and blunt behavior of bourgeois characters with the expressive, curious, and refined behavior of Everard Barfoot, the novel invites readers to judge bourgeois practices with reference to a situated alternative to these practices, rather than by reference to an "underdeveloped and often incoherent evaluative stance" (Anderson 1).

A. *Bourgeois culture is constrained*

One weakness of bourgeois practices emphasized by *The Odd Women* is the judgment that such practices are constraining, or that they disable impulsive and spontaneous modes of enjoyment and self-expression. The novel calls attention to the constraint imposed by Rhoda's habits of efficiency in its description of the self-imposed regimen Rhoda embraces after quarreling with Everard. After Everard refuses to clear up a rumor of his romantic entanglement with Monica, Rhoda reacts by attempting to find

satisfaction in a regimen of discipline that banishes all frivolous forms of emotion from her life:

During the next week she threw herself with energy upon her work ...

This was the only way of salvation. Idleness and absence of purpose would soon degrade her in a sense she had never dreamt of. She made a plan of daily occupation... She even restricted her diet, and ate only just enough to support life, rejecting wine and everything that was most agreeable to her palate.

It is not difficult to perceive the negative judgment the novel associates with Rhoda's plan of work as "the only way of salvation." By leaving "not a vacant moment," Rhoda's regimented schedule makes no allowance for pleasures including "wine," or indeed "everything that was most agreeable to her palate." Soon after this passage, Rhoda even persuades herself later that the entire concept of sexual love is "an impure idea, a vice of blood." Although the novel's depiction of Rhoda's non-traditional views and bright sense of humor render her quite far indeed from a caricature of the stern bourgeois worker, Rhoda's interest in efficiency nevertheless unmistakably interferes with her expression of the antithetical values of playfulness and amusement. Rather than allowing her emotional impulses free reign, Rhoda instead seeks to revive a "stern discipline" to manage frivolous impulses that would interfere with her work. The cost of Rhoda's commitment to her work is further suggested by her choice to remain single at the end of the novel. Rejecting a chance at a potentially happy marriage to a man she once loved, Rhoda instead chooses a career over relationship partly out of a sense of duty to model the ideal of female independence in her personal life.

The constrained behavior that results from Rhoda's commitment to efficiency is much more starkly manifested in Edmund Widdowson, the dutiful husband of Monica Madden. The narrator notes Widdowson's inhibited manner soon after he meets Monica for the first time, as his "sober" and "respectful" conversation precludes any more playful or spontaneous mode of interaction. Although Widdowson's expressions are innocuous enough to Monica upon their first meeting, Widdowson's habitual constraint takes on a more ominous tinge after Monica Madden finds it interfering with her capacity to enjoy married life: to Monica, Widdowson appears perpetually unhappy, as if he always has "cares on [his] mind," and is perpetually "struggling to get rid of them." In a moment of candor, Monica tentatively wonders to Widdowson after their marriage if he might possibly "take life rather too gravely" and suggests that they "ought to have more enjoyment" in their lives. When Widdowson responds by telling Monica that each of them should find pleasure enough in their daily occupations and "duties," Monica argues that it is not "right to make dull work for oneself, when one might be living."

The limitations of bourgeois habits of discipline are thrown in conspicuous relief by the novel's juxtaposition of Rhoda and Widdowson's behavior with a contrasting ethos of playful expressiveness enacted by Everard Barfoot. Everard's rejection of bourgeois efficiency in favor of indulgent amusement is self-consciously defended: having worked for ten years "as hard as any man," after his college years, Everard refuses to let his future be determined by the constraints of economic necessity. When Rhoda asks him what he is going to do with himself, Everard answers that he has "nothing whatever in view, beyond enjoying life." Believing that "to work for ever is to lose half of life," Everard's proposal to Rhoda extends to her an opportunity to exchange

bourgeois responsibility for playful diversion: “We have bidden the world go round for *our* amusement; henceforth it is our occupation to observe and discuss and make merry.”

Everard’s actions and speech are consistent with the goals he articulates. One example where Everard’s behavior meets this standard of playful expressiveness is the letter he sends to his cousin Mary Barfoot. By employing a delicate balance of playful compliments, self-deprecating humor, and personal warmth, Everard challenges the stiff moral judgments that have previously impeded his relationship with Mary:

DEAR COUSIN MARY,--I hear that you are still active in an original way, and that civilization is more and more indebted to you. ...Our last interview was not quite friendly on your side, you will remember, and perhaps your failure to write to me means continued displeasure; in that case I might be rejected at your door, which I shouldn't like, for I am troubled with a foolish sense of personal dignity. I have taken a flat, and mean to stay in London for at least half a year. Please let me know whether I may see you. Indeed I should like to. Nature meant us for good friends, but prejudice came between us. Just a line, either of welcome or "get thee behind me!" In spite of your censures, I always was, and still am, affectionately yours,

EVERARD BARFOOT.'

The distance between Everard’s expressiveness and Rhoda’s regimented efficiency and Widdowson’s constrained respectability is apparent from the opening sentence of Everard’s letter which offers cheerful credit to Mary for contributing to the “progress of civilization.” Cheery and appreciative, Everard’s construction avoids the reverent tones

Mary and Rhoda tend to employ when describing their work: by describing civilization as “indebted” to their work, Everard makes it seem as if civilization is a personal friend who had been singing Mary’s praises over cocktails rather than a cause worthy of earnest self-sacrifice. Further references to matters in the letter that one might expect to be treated with gravity are subjected to a similarly light touch: the idea that Everard might be offended by having his invitation refused is playfully credited to his “foolish sense of personal dignity” and Mary’s moral objections over Everard’s conduct (which we learn later involve the alleged seduction of a young woman) are treated as a matter of mere “prejudice” interfering with their friendship. Like Everard himself, whose expressions of “delicate, good-natured irony” seem “to caress the ear,” the tone of Everard’s letter privileges playful banter over weightier matters of moral respectability. This playful tone in the letter deflates the significance of other concerns—including matters of social progress, norms of hospitality, personal pride, and moral reputation. Insofar as Everard’s discourse is designed to please at a personal level, his expressions are free from the constraining regulations of respectable bourgeois behavior. Everard’s letter is conspicuously purposeless: he is renewing an old acquaintance not out of duty but out of the occasion it affords for an impulsive expression of feeling. Everard’s playful attempts to lighten up the constrained bourgeois characters throughout the novel are often successful: the narrator notes that Everard’s “freedom of expression” causes Rhoda’s eyes to twinkle and Miss Barfoot to laugh, and that his “mirthful humour” and “jesting trivialities,” provoke “a reception of corresponding tone” in his audience. By depicting situations where Everard successfully displays a freedom of expression that more

constrained bourgeois characters do not, the novel invites readers to compare deficiencies of bourgeois practices alongside a situated alternative to them.

B. *Bourgeois culture is rigid*

If the novel invites judgment of Rhoda and Widdowson's constraining sense of duty, it also invites judgment of their rigid and often conventional adherence to social norms. Rhoda has a tendency to prefer outcomes that are simple, clear, and resolved even when this preference comes at the expense of exploring novel sensations, perspectives, and feelings. One particularly notable instance of Rhoda's rigidity occurs in her response to Bella Royston, a student from Rhoda's school who leaves the secretarial school for women to get married and eventually tries to return. Because Rhoda views Bella as having compromised her principles of female independence through her choice of marriage, Rhoda rejects Bella's penitent request for re-admittance. After Bella commits suicide partly in response to Rhoda's decision, Rhoda is not led to reflect on her decision to ban Bella from the school: instead, Rhoda doubles down on her initial view of the situation. Expressing a consistency and resolve that Everard finds partly admirable, Rhoda refuses to second guess her decision even when the school's co-founder Mary voices impassioned disagreement. In this instance, Rhoda's expression of consistency looks more like "obstinacy" than resolution—a quality which Rhoda later admits to Mary is one of her faults. Because Rhoda's firm resolve leads her to suspect any idea or feeling that "sullie[s] the swift, pure stream of her life," she is reluctant to explore new perspectives and feelings. In part because Rhoda tends to stick to what she knows and already believes, she grants to Everard later that "it is difficult ...to keep pace" with his changing experiences and personality. Rather than opening herself to the new

possibilities that a marriage with him would entail, Rhoda also eventually chooses to reject him in order to keep her life consistent and regulated. Her parting words to Everard express both the strength and weakness of a bourgeois mindset when it comes to novelty of thought and sensation: “Don't let us spoil it; things are so straight--and clear--.”

Rhoda's expressions of rigidity pale in comparison to the obtuse intractability of Widdowson, her less intelligent and less confident bourgeois counterpart. Like Rhoda's rigidity, the costs of Widdowson's stubbornness are exacerbated by his position of power over a younger woman, who in this case is his wife, Monica. Widdowson's attempt to regulate Monica's behavior is partly a function of his adherence to outdated patriarchal norms and partly a function of his interest in reinforcing what he already believes and disinterest in reflecting on those beliefs. As Monica observes early in their relationship, “[Widdowson's] mode of speech did not suggest a very active brain”: as such, Widdowson appreciates Monica most when she “listen[s] passively” to his philosophy of life, rather than when she actively reflects on it or supplies alternatives to it.

Widdowson's uneasy relation to thoughts that move beyond the pale of established wisdom is depicted in a brief episode where he honestly considers the difficulties with his and Monica's marriage. As Widdowson questions to himself the strangeness of forcing Monica to remain in a marriage which is “physical and nothing more,” where both parties are demonstrably unsuited to each other, Gissing's narrator describes him as engaging in “daring speculation” that renders him “more worthy of his wife's companionship than ever hitherto.” However, Widdowson quickly becomes uncomfortable as he entertains the unsettling idea of legalized divorce over irreconcilable differences: he feels himself led “to musings which upset the order of the world, and flung all ideas of religion and

morality into wildest confusion,” and thus returns from “his excursion into the realms of reason ... to the safe sphere of the commonplace.” In direct opposition to Everard’s curious and creative reflection that remains open to new perspectives, Widdowson is most comfortable in a realm of common-sense wisdom, where reflection is not required.

The rigid quality of Rhoda’s preference for clarity and Widdowson’s preference for convention contrasts sharply with Everard’s flexible curiosity. Since his college days at Eton—where Everard’s “force of originality” leads him to become a “furious radical” out of distaste for the Eton aristocracy—Everard’s character expresses interest in novelty, challenge, and opposition. Rather than sticking to well-trodden paths proven by tradition and accessible to common-sense, Everard is stimulated by contact with new ideas and perspectives: seeking to think beyond the constraints of “conscience,” “habit,” and “fear of public opinion,” Everard suggests to Rhoda that on the subject of marriage “the world’s opinion has no validity for me.” Everard’s interest in exploring new perspectives also expresses itself in the reflective appreciation he displays for women. Whereas the traditional Widdowson eventually admits to himself that he does not know what his wife’s “thoughts really are, what her intellectual life signifies,” the more curious Everard is initially drawn to Rhoda Nunn out of a purely intellectual interest in her mind. When Everard first meets Rhoda “he long[s] to see further into her mind, to probe the sincerity of the motives she professed, to understand her mechanism, her process of growth.” Although there is a degree of aesthetic objectification in Everard’s desire to understand Rhoda, the attention he pays to her is sensitive and generous as a result. When Rhoda differs from his views, Everard does not treat those differences as threats to be controlled, but as opportunities for exploration. Whereas Widdowson views Monica’s independence

of mind as “a perpetual irritation,” Everard instead feels an urgent desire “to understand [Rhoda’s] line of thought.”

One example of Everard’s curiosity occurs during an argument he has with Rhoda: even when Everard willfully refuses to explain to Rhoda the truth behind the rumor about his history with another woman, he continues to seek out other ways of viewing their conflict by asking his cousin Mary if she thinks that he has behaved “badly” in refusing to explain himself and whether Mary thinks that Rhoda “had reason on her side” in expecting an explanation. Another example of Everard’s curiosity and attentiveness to other perspectives is when he seeks to understand why Rhoda refuses to readmit Bella Royston to the school. Instead of being horrified at what many men of the time period might have viewed as Rhoda’s chillingly unfeminine response to Bella’s plea, Everard is instead intrigued, treating Rhoda’s behavior as a puzzle to investigate rather than an abnormality to be corrected. When Rhoda says that she has “not the slightest regret,” about Bella’s behavior, Everard’s response is to think her answer “magnificent.” Given that most people would easily have hedged about past decisions given a negative outcome, Everard recognizes Rhoda’s action as essentially related to the resolution and efficiency that distinguishes her character. Everard expresses his admiration openly: “How I admire your consistency! We others are poor halting creatures in comparison.” Rhoda does not appreciate Everard’s response because she cannot tell if he is giving his “sincere” approval, or whether he is “practicing [his] powers of irony.” Likely, Everard is doing both: he is using his powers of irony to explore new perspectives with curiosity and sensitivity, while genuinely admiring the results of his investigation.

C. Bourgeois culture is unrefined

In addition to inviting negative judgments of Widdowson and Rhoda's rigid ideas, *The Odd Women* also invites negative judgments of their blunt authenticity. Rhoda seeks to remain true to her own impulses and to remain comparatively unaffected by the desires and expectations of others, she does little work to maintain an engaging self-presentation to others. One conspicuous example of Rhoda's inattentiveness to rituals of social politeness appears when Monica Madden seeks out her advice about an unwanted pregnancy. Rhoda, who also has more personal reasons to be upset with Monica at the time, initially waits in silence, "offering no help whatever, not even that of a look expressing interest." Even after Monica rushes to assert that the rumors romantically linking Monica and Everard are false, Rhoda remains unmoved, reasserting that she has not asked for Monica to explain anything. It is only when Monica begins to defend her reputation and notes how difficult it is for her to speak that Rhoda's feelings are touched by Monica's distress "in spite of herself." Because Rhoda prides her fidelity to her own feelings rather than her responsiveness to the feelings of others, the grudging sensitivity she eventually displays to Monica in this scene occurs not as a result of, but in opposition to her better judgment. As Monica explains her situation, Rhoda feels torn between the impulses of sociability and fellow-feeling and the impulse to say only what she really feels: "Human feeling prompted the listener to declare that she had no doubts left. Yet she could not give utterance to the words. She knew they would sound forced, insincere." Although Rhoda eventually gives Monica counsel, even then Rhoda's speech is not carefully crafted to take Monica's feelings into account but is expressed with unfiltered fidelity to her own inner conviction: Rhoda sees what she says to Monica as an opportunity "for exerting the moral influence on which she prided herself, and which she

hoped to make the ennobling element of her life.” In this interaction, the novel invites readers to see that Rhoda’s earnestness comes at the cost of some coldness and aloofness in her interactions: rather than seeking to charm or soothe her listeners with artistry and attentiveness, Rhoda’s communication is blunt and straightforward.

The comically stilted interactions of Edmund Widdowson serve as a more clearly negative example of bourgeois sincerity gone awry. As Monica insightfully observes, Widdowson has very little interest in or awareness of the feelings of others: “That is the fault in you which causes all this trouble. You haven't a sociable spirit.” Because Widdowson does not have interest in others, his intuitions about other characters are often crude and misdirected: he is completely unaware of his wife’s feelings towards their friend Bevis, and he mistakenly assumes that she has feelings for Everard Barfoot.⁷⁴ Even when Widdowson displays interest in a person, such as the attention he pays to Monica before they are married, Widdowson’s bluntly authentic expressions of personal feeling take little account of how they might be perceived.⁷⁵ When Widdowson attempts to keep his hat from blowing away, Gissing’s narrator has some fun at his expense, noting in an aside that “the ungainliness with which he returned Mrs. Cosgrove's greeting could not have been surpassed.” Widdowson’s awkwardness with others does not just arise from the challenge (“difficult for any man,” the narrator reminds us) of remaining graceful in a high wind, but from his inattentiveness to the requirements of artful and charming social intercourse.

⁷⁴ “[Widdowson’s] jealousy of Barfoot did not glance at Monica's attitude towards the man; merely at the man himself, whom he credited with native scoundrelism.”

⁷⁵ Consider Widdowson’s disturbingly intense expression of love to Monica: “I can't live without seeing you,' he said at length. 'If you refuse to meet me, I have no choice but to come wandering about the places where you are.’”

The relatively stilted interactions of bourgeois characters who pride themselves on authenticity are ironized by contrast with the charming, if somewhat superficial, social artistry of Everard Barfoot. Mary Barfoot's appreciative view of her cousin astutely articulates the diplomatic quality of Everard's interactions with others: "She took refuge in the undeniable fact that the quality of his mind made an impression upon her, that his talk was sympathetic. Miss Barfoot submitted to this influence; she confessed that her cousin's talk had always had a charm for her." The distinct influence Everard's communication has over his cousin depends upon its ability to respond flexibly to the feelings of his audience—to be "sympathetic," and thus, to provide "a charm" to his listeners. Everard's sympathetic talk is demonstrated during an episode where Widdowson finds Everard talking to Monica, who has just lied to her husband about her whereabouts: Everard quickly observes the "obvious embarrassment" on Monica's face, and based on this intelligence, begins to "smooth what he saw as an awkward situation" by talking lightly about pictures in the gallery. Everard's attention to others often gives him this ability to divine what his audience is feeling and quickly respond in context, such as when he takes note of Widdowson's jealousy,⁷⁶ Rhoda's desire to be relieved of his company,⁷⁷ or Rhoda's pleasure when he forcefully holds her hand.⁷⁸ It perhaps is because Everard calculates what to say in context of this diplomatic awareness that his conversation has the appeal it does. Indeed, Monica later credits a previous conversation

⁷⁶ "Turning at length, he began to talk with Mrs. Widdowson, and, because he was conscious of [Widdowson's] jealous eye, assumed an especial sprightliness, an air of familiar pleasantries, to which the lady responded, but with a nervous hesitation."

⁷⁷ "The situation embarrassed both of them. Barfoot suspected a hope on Miss Nunn's part that he would relieve her of his company, but, even had there been no external hindrance, he could not have relinquished the happy occasion. To use frankness was best. 'Out of the question for me to leave the house,' he said, meeting her eyes and smiling. 'You won't be hard upon a starving man?'"

⁷⁸ After Rhoda says that she "make[s] no pretence of equalling you in muscular strength, yet you try to hold me by force," Everard "divine[s] in her pleasure akin to his own, the delight of conflict."

with Everard—in which he had immediately assumed “an air of familiar pleasantry”—as giving her “a new interest in life.” By depicting Everard’s successful expressions of sociable refinement alongside Rhoda and Widdowson’s comparatively blunt and stilted interactions, the novel again invites its readers to make situated judgments about the limitations of bourgeois culture and practice.

VI. Conclusion

After comparing evaluations of bourgeois practices invited by Moretti’s critical study and Gissing’s novel, we are now in a position to assess the kind of judgments each text invites. The first characteristic of the mode of critical judgment cultivated by Moretti’s study was demystification: a tendency to resist reverence for bourgeois ideals in favor of a skeptical view that perceives moments of contradiction and compromise in their expression. Rather than idealizing ideals of earnestness, efficiency, and usefulness, we observed that Moretti’s study took distance from such ideals to emphasize the limitations of these ideals as practically expressed. For instance, Moretti noted that the ideal of bourgeois efficiency in *Robinson Crusoe* functioned to rationalize power arbitrarily acquired through exploitation; he also observed that the ideal of “influence” and “intercourse” in *North and South* spread “a virtuous patina over the harsh realities of social relations” (123, 124). In each case, Moretti’s readings avoided being swept into enthusiasm for bourgeois ideals and instead promoted critical detachment from them. By emphasizing conflict between these value-laden cultural expressions and other unrealized ideals—in this case, between efficiency and equitable social arrangements in *Robinson Crusoe*, and between diplomacy and descriptive clarity in *North and South*—Moretti’s study invited its readers to cultivate demystified judgments of its object.

Gissing's *The Odd Women*, we observed, follows suit in promoting demystified views of bourgeois culture and practice. By emphasizing a conflict between bourgeois practices and unrealized ideals of playfulness, curiosity, and refinement, the novel promotes demystified judgments of its object. Bourgeois culture, the novel suggests, promotes constraint: by calling attention to Rhoda Nunn's habits of "stern discipline," and Edmund Widdowson's habit of "tak[ing] life rather too gravely" under the weight of "cares" and "struggles," the novel invites readers to view the conflict between such practices and an opposing ideal of uninhibited self-expression—what it describes as an ethos of "amusement," "mirthful humour," and "freedom of expression." The novel also cultivates demystified judgments of bourgeois tendencies to rigidity and bluntness: by drawing attention to Rhoda's "obstinacy" and Widdowson's lack of "sociable spirit," the novel measures their practices according to unrealized ideals of curiosity and refinement, respectively. By analyzing bourgeois practices in light of ideals they fail to express, *The Odd Women* mirrors the work of critique, promoting demystified judgments of its object.

In addition to cultivating demystified judgments, Moretti's study also cultivates descriptive judgments. *The Bourgeois*, we observed, invites appreciation for an ethos of professional description that explains the features of bourgeois art and culture in conceptualized language rather than impressionistic effusion. Through attention to keywords and to prose style, *The Bourgeois* aims to make a cultural mindset visible to its readers rather than to promote judgment of something whose meaning is taken for granted. By using specific examples from literature to describe bourgeois habits of earnestness, efficiency, usefulness, comfort, and roba (or stuff), Moretti's study ensures that the evaluative component of its critique corresponds to recognizable practices. For

example, we observed that Moretti's discussion of usefulness employed descriptive rhetoric to invite judgment of the way Victorian authors like Gaskell, Newman, and Bagehot instrumentalize the acquisition of culture. Rather than inviting vague critical judgments of these authors for their 'vulgarity' or praise for their 'profundity,' this discussion invited readers to perceive a specific limitation of the mindset these authors expressed. In moments like this, *The Bourgeois* does not simply tell its readers how to feel about the objects it describes but instead blends evaluation with description in ways that invite readers to perceive cultural expressions from new perspectives.

The same care for description employed in Moretti's study is evident in Gissing's novel. Instead of using abstract evaluative language to praise and criticize bourgeois practices the novelist esteems and dislikes, the novel instead uses a language of thick description designed to cultivate new understandings of objectively identifiable behaviors. For example, the novel describes Rhoda's counsel to Monica as "earnest" and adds further definition to this concept by contrasting Rhoda's advice with the "artificial," "lifeless," and "vapid" tone of Bevis's letter to Monica. The novel also describes Rhoda's efficient work in her school by reference to her "courage" and "resolve"—two character traits which it explicitly contrasts with the "timid" and "weak" behavior of Virginia Madden. Rather than obscuring the reality of bourgeois practices under a shroud of sentimental significance, this language of thick description blends evaluation and description, inviting readers to perceive the practices it describes in conceptualized language.

While the ethos of critique we've observed in Moretti's study offers terms in which to appreciate some aspects of Gissing's accomplishment, then, I've also argued

that *The Odd Women* also cultivates modes of judgment that contrast with other tendencies of critique. In Moretti's study, we observed a tendency to rely on abstract judgments which created the possibility of performative contradiction at the level of evaluative stance. I focused on one point of tension between Moretti's critique of impressionistic discourse in Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and his critique of omniscient narration in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: by indicting Arnold's text for his failure to describe culture in a professional manner and criticizing Austen's narration for the way it disciplines Elizabeth's subjectivity, Moretti appears to endorse both disciplined subjectivity and undisciplined subjectivity at the same time. At the very least, Moretti's reluctance to cite positive examples of professional cultural analysis in his discussion of Arnold or of individualistic resistance to power in his discussion of Austen leaves unclear what practical ethos or form of life might successfully express the positive ideals that underwrite his critique.

If Moretti's critical study courts incoherence at the level of evaluative stance when indicting expressions of bourgeois culture, Gissing's novel does a better job situating its criticism of bourgeois practices by reference to a coherent alternative. That is to say, *The Odd Women* does not just describe limitations of bourgeois culture with a critical vocabulary but also imagines an alternative form of life that would be free from its limitations. Although the novel's depiction of Everard Barfoot is far from uniformly positive, we have seen that the novel imagines situations where his actions express ideals bourgeois characters fail to live up to. By conducting conversations in a light-hearted tone and enjoying an early retirement, Everard concretely enacts an ideal of playful self-expression that the more sober-minded and restrained bourgeois characters do not. So

too, by seeking to understand the perspectives of those who disagree with him and by expertly playing off of the feelings of others, Everard positively enacts the ideals of curiosity and refinement that motivate the novel's critical judgments of bourgeois rigidity and bluntness. By embedding its critical judgments of bourgeois culture in Everard's situated perspective, *The Odd Women* thus avoids the tendency of critique to rely on abstract judgments which lead to "underdeveloped and incoherent evaluative stance[s]" and which nurture "mistrust of the routines and practices through which the everyday business of the world is conducted" (Anderson 1, Felski 2012).

Finally, while Moretti's analysis cultivates predominantly negative judgments of bourgeois culture, we have seen that *The Odd Women* cultivates more charitable modes of judgment. Despite Moretti's own explicit attempts to do justice to bourgeois cultural achievements, we observed that his historicist method promoted predominantly skeptical judgments of bourgeois commitments to values such as earnestness, efficiency, and usefulness. By viewing bourgeois cultural ideals like these as imaginary resolutions to real contradictions in society, Moretti's study invites readers to take distance from the bourgeoisie: to indict them for their tendencies to rationalization, instrumentalism, and greed and for their blindness to the real nature of the capitalist and imperialist societies in which they lived. The only positive value of bourgeois culture celebrated in Moretti's study is prosaic seriousness—an ethos which mirrors the values of description and demystification that underwrite the study's own critical methodology.

In contrast to the predominantly suspicious attitude toward bourgeois cultural practices promoted by Moretti's methods of critique, we observed that *The Odd Women* cultivates charitable judgments of bourgeois practices. By imagining a protagonist whose

actions positively express bourgeois ideals of earnestness, efficiency, and usefulness alongside secondary characters who conspicuously fail to express these values, the novel invites readers to adopt attitudes of care and concern for bourgeois cultural achievements. To fully understand the significance of characters' actions in the novel, readers must learn to evaluate such actions from a bourgeois perspective: appreciating how Rhoda's commitment to earnestness gives her interactions with others a depth of gravity that contrasts with Mr. Bevis's vapidity, how Rhoda's commitment to usefulness secures her independence in contrast to Monica's subservience, and how a commitment to efficiency provides Rhoda with a resolve that contrasts with Virginia's timidity. Rather than inviting readers to view bourgeois practices as dead objects of history, the novel's use of these vivifying character juxtapositions invites readers to view bourgeois culture as an "incomplete project," with ongoing appeal and relevance in the present (Moretti 19). To borrow Bruno Latour's language, *The Odd Women's* imaginative depiction of its protagonist promotes critical judgments of bourgeois practices that assemble rather than debunk, that "offer participants arenas in which to gather" rather than "lift[ing] the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers" (246).

By cultivating judgments that are descriptive, demystified, situated, and charitable in these ways *The Odd Women* cultivates a specific critical ethos that, in some respects, accomplishes the work of critique better than critique itself. Recognizing the sophisticated array of value-judgments invited by the character-system of novels like *The Odd Women* makes it possible to see works of Victorian realism as allies, and not just antagonists, to the aspirations of scholars seeking to re-imagine literary studies in the 21st century.

Chapter 3: The Ambiguous Ethics of Mansfield Park

I. Introduction

To what extent did Jane Austen's systematic depictions of character anticipate the liberal aesthetic of Victorian realists? In this chapter, I explore Austen's contribution to a tradition of expressive realism that uses characters to inform the ethical judgments of readers. I begin by examining formalist and ethical critics of Austen who have drawn attention to the innovative way that Austen's novels use character-systems to cultivate readers' ethical judgments. By depicting characters who express ethical qualities such as 'pride' and 'prejudice,' or 'sense' and 'sensibility,' critics have followed Wayne Booth, Gilbert Ryle, and Alex Woloch in arguing that Austenian novels seek to promote right judgment in readers, helping them perceive a golden mean between extremes such as too much pride or not enough sense. This chapter builds on the work of such critics by applying this Aristotelian ethical framework to the novel that has given critics of Austen the most difficulty: *Mansfield Park*. While formalist and Aristotelian understandings of Austen's character-systems have allowed readers to make important ethical distinctions in other novels—between Knightley's respectful advice and Emma's intrusive interference in *Emma* or between Elinor's judicious sense and Marianne's volatile sensibility in *Sense and Sensibility*, for example—ethical critics have struggled to discern comparatively clear standards for judgment in the character-system of *Mansfield Park*. At once viewed as Austen's most profound and problematic work, *Mansfield Park* remains Austen's most polarizing novel for critics sharply at odds both over the ethical status of the novel's protagonist and of the work as a whole. Joel Weinsheimer's description of the state of criticism in 1974 could be applied today: "Even the most basic of interpretive

questions—the character of the novel's heroine—constitutes a crux and has elicited no consensus among its readers. Whether *Mansfield Park* presents Fanny Price as a prig, a saint, or merely a young woman of mixed qualities is yet to be determined” (185).

This chapter accounts for the critical controversy elicited by *Mansfield Park* by focusing on the role of the novel's stylish secondary characters, Mary and Henry Crawford, who are both rejected as potential love-interests by Fanny Price and her eventual husband Edmund Bertram. Despite the novel's controversial ending, which achieves moral closure through vindicating the protagonist's unequivocal condemnation of the Crawfords, I argue that *Mansfield Park* nevertheless deliberately depicts the marginalized Crawfords as possessing virtues that the novel's heroine does not possess. Fanny's moral denunciation of her romantic rival and rejected suitor thus clash with the rhetorical effect of the novel's character-system: a system which presents the theatrical Crawfords not only as discarded foils but as dialectical antagonists to the sincere Fanny Price. The novel's “power to offend,” to borrow Lionel Trilling's phrase, is commensurate with readers' feelings of unresolved dissonance between the one-sided ethical judgments of its protagonist and the many-sided judgments invited by the depiction of its stylish villains. By using the Crawfords to foreground positive virtues that the novel's protagonist does not possess, *Mansfield Park* paves the way for a new kind of novel: a novel whose character contrasts function not only to clarify the judgments of one conscience through contrasts of degree and situation, but to foreground conflict between multiple consciences in agonistic conflict. Resisting the narrow tone of moral denunciation modeled by its youthful protagonist, the character-system of *Mansfield Park*

invites readers to practice the liberal discipline of holding the strengths and weaknesses of conflicting ethical modes in their minds.

II. The Austenian Character-System

The use of fictional characters to engage and inform the value judgments of readers is a narrative practice that has special affinity with the rise of the realist novel in England. For instance, one can see Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* as inviting readers to discern whether what seems to be virtuous behavior is in fact virtuous—that is, whether the judgments made in the novel, either of Clarissa or Lovelace, fit the practices of those they describe. Given the importance of sifting through imprecise and inaccurate ethical judgments in *Clarissa* (1748), it's possible to describe the novel as a drama of evaluation that hinges on the reader's attempt, along with Clarissa, to discern which judgments in the novel fit their object: for instance, whether Lovelace's behavior does indeed display “ardor,” “respect,” and “solemn[ity],” as Clarissa's sister Arabella suggests, or “patience” and “gentleman[iness],” as the family servants suggest, or “vanity” and “humorous vivacity,” as Anna Howe suggests. By depicting situations in which accurate judgment is difficult, *Clarissa* engages its readers in a project of discerning the extent to which abstract evaluations fit the concrete behaviors of characters.

Jane Austen's fiction preserves Richardson's interest in linking abstract qualities to concrete practice, along with a realistic attention to everyday situations and motivations. However, in the Austenian novel, readers are expected to move beyond assessing primarily logical puzzles for judgment (questions of veracity or distortion, integrity or hypocrisy), to assessing qualitative differences in judgment (questions of superiority and inferiority, excellence and weakness). That is, after Jane Austen, the

drama of the realist novel no longer primarily involves sifting through what distorts and illuminates the truth about another character, as Clarissa must judge Lovelace's true qualities in light of his reputation, rumors about his past, and her own desires. By juxtaposing characters against each other to illumine finer nuances of virtue appropriate to particular situations, Austen's novels also ask readers to practice a different kind of judgment: her novels solicits readers' energies in an ethical process of discriminating between degrees of virtue that characters express in practice.

In *The One vs. the Many*, Woloch emphasizes Austen's contribution to the narrative technique of drawing comparisons between expressions of value. Woloch sees Austen's novels as exemplary for the way in which her narrators' habit of evaluative assessment of different expressions, suggested by titles like *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), create a symbolic architecture that structures readers' attention to the values that characters express. On the basis of comparisons between values like these, readers learn to discriminate between the practices of characters who are privileged by the novel and practices of those who are marginalized:

The process of interior character development...is essentially a *via negativa*, a dialectical process of rejecting different extremes (too much pride, too much sensibility, etc.) to find a middle ground. This process accommodates itself perfectly with an asymmetrical structure of characterization, as various minor characters exemplify certain traits or ways of thinking that the protagonist must learn to discard. This is the pattern in all of Austen's novels: dialectical progress for the central protagonists, and the flattening, fragmentation, and dismissal of many

minor characters who facilitate this progress as negative examples. (The One vs. the Many, p.55)

For Woloch, Austen's "asymmetrical structure of characterization" creates a centrifugal movement, directing attention away from peripheral characters' inferior "traits or ways of thinking" and toward the central character's superior traits. "Character-system" is Woloch's term for the set of oppositions that novels use to privilege a protagonist. The Wolochian character-system works by positioning a protagonist's expressive practice within a field of practical alternatives selected to clarify its advantages. For example, the superiority of Elizabeth Bennet's practice in *Pride and Prejudice* is emphasized through comparison with inferior modes of thinking and feeling demonstrated by her sisters. (Thus, readers perceive the sophistication of Elizabeth's ethical judgments by comparison with Mary's rigid moralism; readers see the discretion in Elizabeth's romantic relationships by comparison to Kitty's frivolous infatuations.) By contrasting with the protagonist's practice in this way, the discarded expressive practices of minor characters articulate a "valorized symbolic register" around their protagonists (The One vs. the Many, p.47). Generalizing from Woloch's emphasis on the antagonistic aspects of this process, we can say that oppositions within a novel's character-system solicit readers' interest in a protagonist's perspective by revealing distinctive strengths, or competitive advantages, of a protagonist's practice. In Chapter 1 I introduced the term "vivification" to describe the kind of contrast between practices Woloch identifies in the character-system of *Pride and Prejudice*. Novels that use vivifying character contrasts juxtapose values enacted by a protagonist with the practices of minor characters that fail to enact those values.

It is not difficult to see how the narrative technique of vivification could be placed in the service of cultivating ethical judgment. An Aristotelian tradition of literary criticism beginning with Gilbert Ryle anticipates what Woloch would later call the “character-system” by noting how Jane Austen’s novels embed moral judgments in character contrasts. As Ryle puts it, “[Austen] pin-points the exact quality of character in which she is interested, and the exact degree of that quality, by matching it against the same quality in different degrees, against simulations of that quality, [and] against deficiencies of it” (7). In *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, Ryle notes that “the ecstatic emotionality of her Marianne is made to stand out against the sham, the shallow, the inarticulate and the controlled feelings of Lucy Steele, Willoughby, Edward and Elinor” (7). Since Ryle, critics have seen this mode of discrimination through character comparison functioning in an Aristotelian way, to draw attention to a virtuous mean by contrast with expressions of excess or deficiency.

If the character system of *Sense and Sensibility* explores the question of the right degree and manner of feeling, one can see the character system of *Emma* as exploring the right degree of solicitude towards another person: as Joel Weinsheimer puts it, “Emma Woodhouse's managerial disposition, for example, is defined by its relation to Mrs. Elton's officiousness on the one hand, and on the other, Mr. Knightley's solicitude. By establishing a clear base of comparison the novelist is able to make delicate and yet thoroughly believable discriminations among her characters” (188). Wayne Booth goes Emma’s ethical scheme offers the novel’s implied author to readers as the model of the “perfect human being, within the concept of perfection established by the book”—that is, a human being who is, among other things, “as generous and wise as Knightley,” and “as

subtle and witty as Emma would like to think herself” (265). Granting that the kind of perfection exhibited by the novel “is not quite attainable in real life,” Booth nevertheless suggests that *Emma* harmonizes the competing views of its characters into a single view of the good life. For Booth and other Aristotelian critics, Austen’s novels convey a view of right ethical judgment as a harmony between competing views, or a virtuous mean between extremes.

Gilbert Ryle argues that all Austen’s novels excepting *Northanger Abbey* can be understood as operating in this Aristotelian mode.⁷⁹ But *Mansfield Park* has also proved difficult to reconcile with Ryle’s Aristotelian conception of the Austenian character-system. While the ethical judgments invited by character contrasts in Austen’s other novels, have appeared relatively straightforward to ethical critics, the abstract moral judgments embedded in *Mansfield Park* have elicited hesitance and even hostility. While critics including Lionel Trilling, William Deresiewicz, David Lodge, and Joyce Tarpley defend the moral judgments associated with the protagonist, others complain about the moral judgments associated with Fanny Price. Jenny Davidson summarizes a few such objections: “Avrom Fleishman attributes to Fanny the ‘moral aggressiveness’ that is the submissive person’s only way to express hostility towards those on whom she depends; Kingsley Amis describes Fanny as ‘a monster of complacency and pride ... under a cloak of cringing self-abasement’; Claudia, L. Johnson identifies Fanny as *Mansfield Park*’s ‘most obsequious and most disastrously indoctrinated inmate’” (qtd in Davidson 146).

⁷⁹ Ryle includes *Pride and Prejudice*, which “really is about pride and about the misjudgements that stem from baseless pride, excessive pride, deficient pride, pride in trivial objects, and so on,” *Persuasion*, which concerns itself with “persuadability, unpersuadability and over-persuadability,” and *Mansfield Park*, which concerns itself with “affection which [characters] feel, or do not feel, or which they only pretend to feel for their own flesh and blood” (5).

If critics have disagreed about the degree to which Fanny's judgments are warranted, they have also disagreed about whether the novel aligns itself with those judgments. While critics like Allen Dunn, Andrew Wright, Felicia Bonaparte, and Thomas Williams view Fanny's judgments as a guide to the opinions of the novel's implied author, critics such as William Magee, Marvin Murdrick, and Michiel Heyns have contended that the authority of Fanny's judgments are undermined in many cases by the novel's ironic presentation.⁸⁰ Massimiliano Morini's formal analysis of evaluation in the novel sheds no light on these difficulties, concluding that linguistic scrutiny of evaluative patterns offers little help in discerning who evaluates whom in Austen and the degrees of authority accorded to each.⁸¹

These thorny and seemingly irreconcilable critical disagreements about the novel's protagonist could not have persisted for more than two hundred years of Austen criticism unless the opinions of each camp had firm foundation in the novel. This chapter accounts for the polarized responses of ethical critics by arguing that *Mansfield Park* differs from other Austenian novels in its use of a character-system that invites conflicting judgments in readers. I make this case by focusing on the novel's use of two rhetorical tasks of character-juxtaposition that invite readers to adopt both favorable and unfavorable judgments of the protagonist, respectively. I call these tasks vivification and ironization:

⁸⁰ For instance, although Allen Dunn acknowledges that "there is an implicit tension between [Fanny's] role as caretaker and her role as impartial judge of character," Dunn views Fanny's ability "to judge herself objectively" as giving her "the right of judging Mary" (497, 496). Thomas Williams argues similarly that "Fanny Price is the one character whose judgment never leads her astray," since "she sees all the folly of Maria's engagement, the intrigues of the rehearsals of *Lover's Vows*, and the vices of the Crawfords with a discernment that no one around her approaches" (226). In direct contrast, Michiel Heyns suggests that "Jane Austen shares at least some of our reservations about Fanny Price" and argues that "much of what we may be tempted to see as a 'straight' presentation of Fanny Price is in fact tempered by an amused mimicking of the prim speech of a morally immature girl" (4).

⁸¹ See Morini 2007.

vivification describes a novel's depiction of a protagonist who expresses virtues that a secondary character does not, whereas ironization describes a secondary character who expresses virtues that a protagonist does not. In what follows, I analyze these two rhetorical operations in turn as they apply to the depiction of Fanny Price and Mary and Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. I begin by considering evidence for vivification in the novel: in this case, moments in which *Mansfield Park* invites rhetorical alignment with its protagonist, Fanny Price, by calling attention to the way she successfully enacts values of feeling, discipline, sincerity, and modesty.

III. Vivification in Mansfield Park

In *Mansfield Park*, one of the foremost qualities that distinguishes Fanny Price's character to the implied reader of the novel is her discipline, or what Fanny's principled and upright cousin, Edmund Bertram, perceives as her "strong desire of doing right." Lionel Trilling and others have viewed the title character of *Mansfield Park* as Jane Austen's attempt to explicitly thematize the importance of principled religious conduct to her young niece—a view further reinforced by Austen's statement to her sister that *Mansfield Park* addresses the topic of "ordination."⁸² Even the cavalier Henry Crawford astutely recognizes the quality of principled discipline in Fanny: "When he talked of her having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious."⁸³ "Steadiness," "regularity," "decorum," "integrity"—such

⁸² *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), p. 298, qtd in Weinsheimer 190.

⁸³ This passage is also cited in Tarpley 25.

diction thematizes the scrupulous and conscientious mindset of a person determined to do the right thing even when it is difficult or unpleasant or when no one else may be watching to approve. Edmund's description of the clergy also articulates the kind of principled integrity that Henry recognizes in Fanny. Rather than being merely "the arbiters of good-breeding," or "the regulators of refinement and courtesy," a clergyman must regulate his conduct in accord with good principles: he must prove himself through "constant attention" to the practice of daily life among his parishioners. It is Fanny even more so than Edmund whose scrupulous and conscientious mindset displays steady determination to do the right thing apart from any promise of praise or reward. When Fanny makes the unpopular choice not to participate in the play "Lover's Vows" while Sir Thomas is away, she does so out of a principled sense of duty. Even though Fanny does briefly agree to fill in as a substitute, Edmund praises her for being the only one of the party "who has judged rightly throughout; who has been consistent" in her condemnation. Austen presents Fanny's choice as regulated not by a sense of what will meet with the approval of Fanny's peers (they all entreat her to join), or what will give her most pleasure (she personally enjoys the idea of viewing a performance), but by a sense of what is proper for a group of unmarried young people to do and a sense of obligation to her uncle.⁸⁴ Fanny's resistance to acting is, simultaneously, an embrace of strictures arguably necessary to moral and social life: rather than using the play as a thinly-veiled excuse to exercise immodest and

⁸⁴ Fanny's choice to resist the theatricals is partly at odds with her own inclination: "For her own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen even half a play, but everything of higher consequence was against it."

unregulated desires, Fanny remains steadily entrenched in her habit of responsible discipline.⁸⁵

The novel presents Fanny's conscientious, disciplined response to the theater as a striking contrast with the undisciplined behaviors of other characters who lack her almost religious fear of wrongdoing. Foils with much the same function as Kitty and Lydia Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, Fanny's cousins Maria and Julia Bertram both succumb to unregulated desires and eventually elope in disgrace. Fanny's uncle, Sir Thomas, reflects on Maria and Julia's upbringing in a way that emphasizes their lack of discipline: "He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting; that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice." "Active principle," or principle not merely praised and rehearsed but practiced and believed, sharply distinguishes Fanny's behavior from Maria and Julia's. This same deficiency in principled integrity is more interestingly present in Mary and Henry Crawford, whose parents failed to model a sense of principle in their feelings toward their children, each showing unabashed favoritism for a different child.⁸⁶ Raised by his parents to live in harmony with his own inclination rather than with a sense of duty, Henry Crawford lacks Fanny's embrace of discipline. Before Henry and Maria's affair, Edmund observes this contrast between Henry and Fanny: "Crawford's feelings, I am ready to acknowledge, have hitherto been too much his guides. ... You will

⁸⁵ For a helpful take on the way the theatricals function as a means for the characters "to express their private and already immodest feelings" see Canuel 138.

⁸⁶ "Admiral and Mrs. Crawford, though agreeing in nothing else, were united in affection for these children, or, at least, were no farther adverse in their feelings than that each had their favourite, to whom they showed the greatest fondness of the two."

supply the rest; and a most fortunate man he is to attach himself to such a creature—to a woman who, *firm as a rock in her own principles*, has a gentleness of character so well adapted to recommend them” (emphasis added).

Austen’s narrator again explicitly foregrounds the weakness of Henry’s habit of guidance by feeling in an aside about his decision to postpone a trip to administer his estate in Norfolk for a party at Mrs. Fraser’s: “The temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right: he resolved to defer his Norfolk journey, resolved that writing should answer the purpose of it, or that its purpose was unimportant, and staid.” Although postponing a business trip may be a matter of practical responsibility more so than a matter of what is morally “right,” Henry’s inability to regulate behavior out of a sense of duty appears deficient in contrast to more disciplined characters like Fanny or Sir Thomas. When Fanny refuses Henry’s proposal, she does so out of her low view of Henry’s old habit of guidance by impulse at the expense of duty. Seeking novelty, pleasure, and excitement above duty, discipline, and propriety, Henry although possessing “sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better,” nevertheless “allow[s] himself great latitude” especially in his careless and eventually harmful flirtations with Julia and Maria.

In addition to foregrounding a contrast between dutiful responsibility and unregulated desire, Fanny is also the site at which the novel contrasts single-minded sincerity with self-divided flippancy.⁸⁷ Fanny displays a Romantic unity of practice with feeling—she speaks and acts on the basis of what she genuinely feels rather than what she expects will appear pleasing to others. For instance, Fanny’s gratitude for Edmund’s

⁸⁷ For other analysis of Fanny’s expressions of sincerity in *Mansfield Park*, see Trilling’s essay in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, MacIntyre 224-5, and Dunn 493-4.

kind hospitality when she first arrives at Mansfield is communicated through “a few artless words”; although she would like to please Edmund, her candid communication does not perform with regard to its calculated effect on her audience. Recognizing this quality in Fanny, Edmund later describes Fanny as possessing a “heart which knew no guile.” Fanny’s unaffected, heartfelt expressions contrast directly with Mary Crawford’s canny diplomacy. As they both receive a tour of the Rushworth mansion, the distinction between Fanny’s earnest sincerity and Mary’s masked detachment is apparent: “There was no comparison in the willingness of their attention; for Miss Crawford, who had seen scores of great houses, and cared for none of them, had only the appearance of civilly listening, while Fanny, to whom everything was almost as interesting as it was new, attended with unaffected earnestness to all that Mrs. Rushworth could relate of the family in former times.” The differences between Fanny’s sincere interest and Miss Crawford’s detached performance of interest become ethically significant when applied to other situations. Mary’s surface level engagement with feelings not only leads to her detachment from boring conversations in polite society but her detachment from virtuous principles. The latitude and laxity that Henry, Maria, and Julia display in practice, Mary displays in judgment, as Mary sees no appeal in the profession of clergyman, has no admiration for those who are honest but poor, and who confesses her happiness at the prospect of Tom Bertram’s death (which would supply the man she loves with an inheritance). While Mary is responsive to what others feel, the novel does not present her as speaking and judging based on the depth of her own conviction about particular issues; instead, she appears strangely depthless in matters of value judgment. Like her brother, Henry, Mary appears deficient in the ability to act with “sentiment and feeling, and

seriousness on serious subjects.” Although Mary’s worldly, even “amoral” conscience does not lead her to commit vice herself, it does lead her to take vice lightly (Bonaparte 58). The fatal judgment that divides Mary from Edmund occurs when he hears her canvass Maria’s adulterous affair with Henry as merely an imprudent act of “folly” that would be alleviated if hushed up rather than as an act with moral valence reflecting negatively on the character of those involved.⁸⁸

In direct contrast to Mary’s indiscriminating performances of feeling, Fanny’s convictions are presented as more measured and careful; she is earnest about the profession of the clergy and views Tom’s illness with the gravity it deserves. Fanny’s ability to discriminate between the weight of competing claims is perhaps most apparent in the thought she supplies about whether to wear the necklace Mary lends her to a ball: Fanny only does so after acknowledging that Mary has a claim to her affections and that acknowledging it does not “interfere with the stronger claims” of William and Edmund on her heart. Fanny’s level of fine-grained attention to matters of feeling—her discriminating judgment based on a hierarchy of competing convictions—appears exemplary by contrast with Mary’s more cavalier and indiscriminate relation to matters of the heart and soul.

In addition to prioritizing earnest discrimination at the expense of glib equivocation, character contrasts also emphasize Fanny’s grateful modesty at the expense of other characters’ entitled vanity. Fanny does not possess an ego easily wounded by others; rather than expecting to be treated according to a particular standard, Fanny modestly appreciates any kindness shown to her. When the Bertrams decide briefly that

⁸⁸ As Edmund emphasizes: “It was the detection, not the offence, which she reprobated.”

Fanny should leave Mansfield to live with the unpleasant Mrs. Norris, Fanny accepts the decision, taking care not to show ingratitude despite her disappointment.⁸⁹ Fanny's accepting nature is not just reflected in her responses to her adult benefactors, but to their children. When the young Fanny suffers mistreatment from the careless Maria and Julia, "she [thinks] too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by it"; when it appears that Tom is about to ask her to dance but then does not, she feels unreasonable to have expected such a "great honor"; when Edmund asks to borrow her mare to ride with Mary Crawford she "far from feeling slighted, [is] almost over-powered with gratitude that he should be asking her leave for it." Fanny's expectations for how others treat her are low: she does not demand to be treated a particular way, and is thus content with neglect and grateful for any kindness that is bestowed upon her. Even Fanny's relatively intimate relationship with Edmund does not make her feel entitled to make assumptions about his regard: her treatment of him is not just "tender" and "confiding," but also "respectful" and "grateful." Like Fanny, Edmund is also a positive exemplar in his unassuming expectations for others: he is not offended when Mary speaks ill of the profession of the clergy, and his vanity is not sufficient to make him assume that Mary loves him.

Because Maria and Julia grow up accustomed to the flattery of their aunt Mrs. Norris, whose continual praises "strengthen them in believing they had no faults," they grow up lacking the "self-knowledge, generosity, and humility" of their cousin and brother. As Sir Thomas later reflects, too great a degree of "self-consequence" can have harmful effects on one's character. Julia's sense of entitlement is displayed primarily in the resentment she bears towards her sister for stealing the attentions of Henry Crawford,

⁸⁹ Fanny takes care not to show ingratitude to her aunt despite displeasure at the idea of leaving *Mansfield Park*: "I hope I am not ungrateful, aunt," said Fanny modestly.

which she feels counts as conduct “shameful towards herself.”⁹⁰ Maria’s vanity is more pronounced. It is her pride that initially attracts her to Rushworth, a man she does not love: as Maria tours Rushworth’s property, she is elated by the idea that “Mr. Rushworth’s consequence was hers,” taking care to point out every detail of his property to Mary Crawford. Maria’s pride both instigates and precipitates her marriage since she not only seeks to possess the Sotherton estate but also to expedite the marriage after Henry’s departure injures her pride.

Maria’s thirst for consequence is shared not only by Mary Crawford, whose taste for “distinction” is so powerful that she has little regard for honest clergymen who aren’t wealthy,⁹¹ but also--especially--by Henry Crawford, whose need to be appreciated by others fuels his romantic pursuits. Henry’s interest in Fanny does not begin with any depth of feeling on his side, but as an idle flirtation spurred on by the challenge of overcoming Fanny’s indifference. Here, the implications are relatively harmless: the coldness of Henry’s initial decision is mitigated by the fact that he eventually comes to love her, even if the intensity of his love is partly due to his sense of “glory” at the prospect of victory and in a questionable belief that her affection is “of greater consequence because it was withheld.” Henry’s inability to tolerate any indifference to his charms, while innocuous in his relationship with Fanny, has more serious consequences in his flirtation with Maria. Henry makes the imprudent decision to visit

⁹⁰ “The sister with whom she was used to be on easy terms was now become her greatest enemy: they were alienated from each other; and Julia was not superior to the hope of some distressing end to the attentions which were still carrying on there, some punishment to Maria for conduct so shameful towards herself as well as towards Mr. Rushworth. ... Julia could never see Maria distinguished by Henry Crawford without trusting that it would create jealousy, and bring a public disturbance at last.”

⁹¹ Edmund tells Mary that he is anxious for her to not look down upon “honesty ... in the middle state of worldly circumstances,” and Mary replies: “But I do look down upon it, if it might have been higher. I must look down upon anything contented with obscurity when it might rise to distinction.”

Maria after her marriage to Rushworth because his invitation to the Grant's party is made to be "of flattering consequence." After vanity places him in the dangerous situation, it is further rankled by the cold reception he receives from Maria: "He could not bear to be thrown off by the woman whose smiles had been so wholly at his command: he must exert himself to subdue so proud a display of resentment ...and make Mrs. Rushworth Maria Bertram again in her treatment of himself." Rather than modestly accepting Maria's lower view of him, Henry cannot resist soliciting the flattering attentions he had previously enjoyed. Especially after being met with sustained indifference from Fanny despite his best efforts, winning over Maria satiates Henry's craving for the attention of others. By contrast, the more modest Fanny, far from acting rashly as a result of injured pride, hardly even feels resentment towards the object of her true affection when he loves another woman.⁹² Like Julia, Maria, and his sister Mary, Henry's vanity motivates him to have excessive concern for the opinions of others in comparison to the more grounded Fanny and Edmund.

In addition to foregrounding Fanny's modest gratitude at the expense of other characters' entitled vanity, character contrasts also highlight Fanny's superior depth of feeling at the expense of other characters' lighter and more indiscriminate attachments.⁹³ Fanny is described as possessing "an affectionate heart," by Edmund and as displaying "tenderness of disposition" by Austen's narrator. After Henry Crawford falls in love with

⁹² Even when Edmund borrows Fanny's mare so that Mary can ride it, forgetting that Fanny needs it, Fanny does not express any justifiable resentment she may feel towards Edmund. And if she does feel resentment to Edmund, she does not act on it, instead displacing her feelings onto the innocent Henry Crawford. (See Heyns 6-8).

⁹³ Ryle: "Their capacities or incapacities to make good husbands or wives are a direct function of their lovingness or unlovingness inside their own families. Fanny's devotedness to her brother William, her cousins, aunt and uncle gets its reward in happy marriage; while her coldheartedness at home results in marital disaster for Maria" (10).

her, he realizes that Fanny's initial reserve masks a deep underlying affection for those she loves: "He was no longer in doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling. It would be something to be loved by such a girl." Fanny's "genuine feeling" for others is not just acknowledged verbally by characters but displayed in practice, nowhere more vividly than early in the novel when she sits with Mr. Rushworth, the hapless suitor of her cousin Maria Bertram. The group of young people are on a walk at the Rushworth property when they come to a locked gate. After Rushworth leaves to retrieve the key, Fanny observes Henry persuading Maria to pass around the gate, effectively abandoning Rushworth. Jealous of Henry's attentions to Maria and dejected at the prospect of being abandoned by the others, Rushworth voices his feelings to Fanny when he returns. Feeling that Rushworth "had been very ill-used," Fanny emphasizes how unlucky Rushworth's situation is, observes how obliging he was to retrieve the key in the first place, and encourages him to rejoin the party since his opinion on the view of the house will be wanted. After the fact, Henry accords the small heroism of Fanny's generous response to Rushworth the recognition it deserves: "You were Mr. Rushworth's best friend. Your kindness and patience can never be forgotten."

Along with Edmund's kindnesses to Fanny after she first arrives at Mansfield Park, the value of Fanny's tenderness to Rushworth is especially emphasized when juxtaposed against the actions of those less responsive to others. For instance, Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram both display carelessly selfish behavior when they abandon Rushworth during the walk and also later when they flirt in front of him during the theatricals. The absence of Fanny's generous sensitivity is also emphasized by contrast with Lady Bertram and her sister Mrs. Norris, whose languid selfishness and officious

economy respectively display a nearly comical disregard for Fanny's feelings. Whether Fanny is instructed to gather roses until she becomes sick for Lady Bertram's convenience or to learn to do without frivolous luxuries like a fire at Mrs. Norris's command, the importance of feeling for others is made conspicuous in the novel by its absence. Even Sir Thomas's insistence that Fanny reconsider Henry Crawford's proposal reveals a moment where his initial concern for Fanny's financial future veers into "cold sternness." Here, Fanny's regret that "she had no one to take her part, to counsel, or speak for her," emphasizes the standard by which Sir Thomas's practice falls short.

It is not just Fanny's ability to sympathize with those slighted by others, but even more her depth of feeling for those she cares about that distinguishes her character. Fanny displays an affection for the inhabitants of Mansfield Park that they don't wholly deserve⁹⁴. Although as a child she regrets her relief when Sir Thomas first leaves the house, she cherishes every member of the house when she is later away for three months in Portsmouth: "Her eagerness, her impatience, her longings to be with them, were such as to bring a line or two of Cowper's *Tirocinium* for ever before her. 'With what intense desire she wants her home,' was continually on her tongue." Excepting Mrs. Norris, the inhabitants of Mansfield are dear to her: not only Edmund, but even her insensible aunt, brusque uncle, and frivolous cousins entwine themselves around her heart. Like the evergreen tree she admires at the Grants', Fanny remains constantly attached to the soil in which she has grown.

⁹⁴ "Their departure made another material change at Mansfield, a chasm which required some time to fill up. The family circle became greatly contracted; and though the Miss Bertrams had latterly added little to its gaiety, they could not but be missed. Even their mother missed them; and how much more their tenderhearted cousin, who wandered about the house, and thought of them, and felt for them, with a degree of affectionate regret which they had never done much to deserve!"

By contrast, Mary and Henry Crawford display a lighter touch when it comes to matters of the heart, shedding associations that become boring or inconvenient like so many leaves. Edmund's reflection on whether Mary is really beginning to love him conceptualizes the danger presented by Mary's lighter orientation to matters of the heart; he speculates that "the whirl of a ballroom, perhaps, was not particularly favourable to the excitement or expression of serious feelings."⁹⁵ Unlike Fanny, who feels things too strongly and earnestly to modulate them with ease, Mary has the ability to detach herself more readily from what she feels—a quality that, while exciting interest and enhancing desire, does not recommend itself to a person seeking emotional security from a potential spouse. Concern about the capacity for deep feeling not only characterizes Edmund's speculations about Mary before the dance, but Fanny's judgments of Henry at a party. After a bitterly disappointed Maria has married Rushworth, Henry Crawford returns to Mansfield Park apparently insensible to remembrances of his past romance. Upon observing Henry, Fanny observes the difference in their level of feeling for those not present:

Her two absent cousins, especially Maria, were much in her thoughts on seeing him; but no embarrassing remembrance affected his spirits. Here he was again on the same ground where all had passed before, and apparently as willing to stay and be happy without the Miss Bertrams, as if he had never known Mansfield in any other state. She heard them spoken of by him only in a general way, till they were all re-assembled in the drawing-

⁹⁵ Although Mary's feelings for Edmund are indeed present—the news of his departure for the clergy comes upon her "like a blow that had been suspended"—Mary nevertheless deals with Edmund's apparent disinterest much differently than Fanny, resolving to "meet him with his own cool feelings."

room, when Edmund ... began talking of them with more particularity to his other sister. With a significant smile, which made Fanny quite hate him, he said, "So! Rushworth and his fair bride are at Brighton, I understand; happy man!"

Fanny is led to hate Henry after this exchange not just because he appears insensible to the ties of the past, passing his time "as if he had never known Mansfield in any other state" and was unaffected by any "embarrassing remembrance." In addition to Henry's forgetfulness, it is the impersonality of his feelings that jars Fanny: Henry comments on the happiness of Maria and Mr. Rushworth as if it were a morsel of gossip rather than an event in which he shares a personal history. The ironic detachment of his knowing, "significant smile," is what provokes Fanny's ire. Even Henry's brief moment of serious reflection later that Maria "is much too good" for Rushworth masks any personal sentiment that may remain for her under a cloak of impersonal judgment. In his initial flirtation and eventual affair with Maria, Henry's display of superficial feeling is consistent: as Lionel Trilling astutely puts it, Henry "becomes ...the prey to his own charm, and in his cold flirtation with Maria Bertram he is trapped by his impersonation of passion."

IV. Ironization in Mansfield Park

Through a careful system of character juxtapositions, the novel thus invites its implied reader to make favorable value judgments of its heroine. To fully understand the significance of the action in the novel, the ideal reader of Austen's novel must perceive the ethical contrast between Fanny's behavior and that of other characters: appreciating her enactment of dutiful responsibility rather than unregulated desire, single-minded

sincerity rather than self-divided flippancy, grateful modesty rather than entitled vanity, and steadfast loyalty rather than wavering selfishness. To the degree that the novel asks its implied readers to judge its protagonist in a positive light, *Mansfield Park* closely follows the model of earlier novels, like *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*.

The novel also differs from such works, however, by the degree to which it uses its character-system to place the actions of its protagonist in an unflattering light. While other critics of the novel precede me in identifying ways in which *Mansfield Park* ironizes its protagonist, I am not aware of any discussion of irony in the novel that attributes negative judgments of the protagonist to the effect of the novel's character-system.⁹⁶ I turn now to an examination of how *Mansfield Park* invites negative judgments of Fanny Price's comparatively sedentary, anxious, simple, and reserved behavior by contrast with the vivacity, confidence, theatricality, and openness, exhibited by Henry and Mary Crawford.

Perhaps the foremost quality that distinguishes the Crawfords from other characters in the novel is their energy: Mrs. Grant notes upon meeting them that "the manners of both were lively and pleasant," and Maria Bertram accurately observes

⁹⁶ Critics such as Lionel Trilling and Joel Weinsheimer precede me in intuitively associating the character-system of *Mansfield Park* with a mode of many-sided judgment. As Trilling puts it: "Of Mary Crawford, whose charm almost equals her brother's, we are led to expect that her vivaciousness and audacity will constitute the beneficent counter/principle to the stodginess which, as the novel freely grants, is one of the attributes of Mansfield Park" (*Sincerity and Authenticity* 78). However, because Trilling and Weinsheimer read the novel as asking its readers to dismiss rather than appreciate the Crawfords' antithetical expressions of value, their accounts of the novel give short shrift to the narrative techniques the novel uses to elicit the kind of many-sided judgments they make.

Explicit discussions of irony in *Mansfield Park* have also shed little light on the many-sided judgments built into the novel's character system. While Michiel Heyns makes an especially persuasive case that the novel's attention to Fanny's jealousy and immature moral vocabulary mitigates the privilege the novel accords to her perspective, Heyns tends to locate the ironic undermining of Fanny's perspective in the novel's revelation of unconscious biases and inconsistencies in her judgments. This focus tends to neglect the effect of irony that results from the novel's deliberate juxtaposition of Fanny's weaknesses with the values the Crawfords successfully express.

Mary's "energy of character." Liveliness and energy characterize the action and speech of the Crawford siblings throughout the novel, most notably with respect to their performance in the theatrical production of *Lover's Vows*. As Henry later reflects: "I shall always look back on our theatricals with exquisite pleasure. There was such an interest, such an animation, such a spirit diffused. Everybody felt it. We were all alive. There was employment, hope, solicitude, bustle, for every hour of the day." The articulate terms of evaluation placed in Henry's mouth ("interest," "animation," "spirit," "employment," "hope," "bustle") suggest that the lively energy he and his sister display is not just a reflex of their animal spirits, but also a practice whose value Austen wants to foreground to readers. Dialogue given to both Henry and Mary, (who also looks back on the theatricals as a time of "exquisite happiness"), eloquently praises energetic activity: valuing "animation" above passivity, "spirit" above lifelessness, "employment" above idleness, "interest" over fastidiousness. Whether they are riding horses or playing cards, their actions are characterized by spirited investment in the activity in question. Although Fanny judges Mary's "lively and affectionate" style of writing to be "an evil," Edmund's more fine-grained affirmation of the liveliness displayed by the Grants and Crawfords communicates the more pluralistic and precise standard of judgment exhibited by the novel's implied author. As Edmund justly reflects after the theatricals: "We [at Mansfield Park] are sometimes a little in want of animation among ourselves. ... I have been feeling as if we had never lived so before." Although Edmund's stated regret is that the Grants are no longer there to "enliven" Mansfield Park, the actual enlivening force has been the presence of the Crawford siblings, who interact much more frequently with the residents of Mansfield Park than the Grants. Even on one of the rare occasions that the novel does

depict the Grants interacting with the residents of Mansfield Park, during a card game, it is not they who enliven the group: it is rather the Crawfords' table whose animating influence turns out to make "a very comfortable contrast to the steady sobriety and orderly silence of the other."⁹⁷

The contrast between the Crawfords' liveliness and Fanny's stillness is explicitly foregrounded by telling juxtapositions that reveal the rhetorical design of the novel's creator.⁹⁸ Fanny finds that "to sit in the shade on a fine day, and look upon verdure, is the most perfect refreshment"; by contrast, Mary's energy is so abundant that she actually feels drained by stillness, responding to Fanny, "I must move ... Resting fatigues me." Fanny's instinctive contentment with a low threshold of stimulation and her resistance to activity and noise faces pressure from the competing standard exhibited by the Crawfords during the performance of the play. When Mrs. Grant cannot attend the play's final rehearsal, the energy, bustle, and animation that Henry, Mary, and Edmund identify with the theatricals is threatened: "They could not act, they could not rehearse with any satisfaction without her. The comfort of the whole evening was destroyed." In order that the evening's animating activity not to come to a grinding halt, every member of the party entreats Fanny to read Mrs. Grant's part. Were Fanny an aspiring actress, or anticipating a chance to attract Edmund's attentions with a breakthrough role, there's no question that her principled resistance against the pressure exerted by the entire group would appear to readers as heroic. As is, though, Fanny's instincts are mixed: she finds

⁹⁷ For instance, the Grants do not manage to enliven the card table they sit at with Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris: it is rather the table with Henry and Mary which turns out to be "a very comfortable contrast to the steady sobriety and orderly silence of the other."

⁹⁸ Trilling and Weinsheimer also observe this contrast between the Crawfords' liveliness and Fanny's stodginess.

the prospect of the play entertaining but also distressing and wonders to herself: “Why had not she rather gone to her own room, as she had felt to be safest, instead of attending the rehearsal at all? She had known it would irritate and distress her; she had known it her duty to keep away.” Whether Fanny’s sense of “duty” is the driving force or an afterthought isn’t precisely clear from this description, since the same activity that enlivens everyone else only “irritate[s]” and “distress[es]” her. Whether Fanny’s irritation bespeaks the pangs of a disciplined conscience or merely the same dislike of overstimulation and “noise” she experiences in Portsmouth is left indeterminate by the passage. After Fanny does finally agree to participate, she perhaps risks complicity with what turns out to function as a “proximate occasion of sin” (Lodge); however, she also avoids being the one who ruins the party. Were Fanny’s mixture of preference for stillness and dutifulness so strong that everyone else’s happiness in the evening’s activity were of no consequence to her, she might well be a saint, but she would certainly not appear perfect as a friend.

In addition to displaying greater animation than the residents of Mansfield Park, the Crawfords also display a greater penchant for performance, playing their parts in the drama of social life with exceptional poise and grace.⁹⁹ During the rehearsals for the theatricals, even Fanny admits that Henry “was considerably the best actor of all.”¹⁰⁰ Henry’s interest acting arises from his appreciation of novelty. He relishes the opportunity to try out new characters, demonstrating his protean ability to adapt precisely

⁹⁹ Lionel Trilling makes a version of this point when he contrasts the style of the Crawfords with the sincerity of Fanny Price, and cites the passage that describes Henry as “truly dramatic” (qtd in *Sincerity and Authenticity* 78).

¹⁰⁰ See Heyns 6-8 for an astute description of Fanny’s unfair judgment of Henry’s horsemanship.

to the tone and feeling required in a given situation:¹⁰¹ “whether it were dignity, or pride, or tenderness, or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty. It was truly dramatic.” Where the expression of Henry’s talent for acting most matters in the novel, though, is not in the theater, but in its application to social life. Henry’s pursuit of Fanny is aided by “all that gallantry and wit” can supply; his quick cleverness leads him to the precise manners that most recommend themselves to others. Henry displays this flexibility of manner particularly when he goes to Portsmouth to visit Fanny, who is accompanied by her younger sister, Susan. Although Henry is initially disappointed at the necessity of sharing Fanny’s attention with Susan, he readily adapts to the requirements of the setting: “Such a man could come from no place, no society, without importing something to amuse; his journeys and his acquaintance were all of use, and Susan was entertained in a way quite new to her.” Henry’s ability to find the precise tone and manner to keep his company entertained also demonstrates itself when he teaches Fanny to play cards “in high spirits, doing everything with happy ease, and preeminent in all the lively turns, quick resources, and playful impudence that could do honour to the game.” This knack for gamesmanship and play is shared by Mary, whose “wit” and “clever[ness]” both when performing on the harp and in social interactions, match her brother’s. Whether Mary is indicting her brother for poor letter writing, comparing Maria’s marriage to a pagan sacrifice, or resisting Edmund’s attempt to “attack” her with his watch, she readily supplies the “agreeable trifling,” “pleasant anecdotes,” and “entertaining stories” that make society amusing.

¹⁰¹ As Henry observes to the Bertram sisters: “I feel as if I could be anything or everything; as if I could rant and storm, or sigh or cut capers, in any tragedy or comedy in the English language.”

The contrast between the Crawfords' theatrical performance and the rest of Mansfield Park parallels the contrast between their card table and the "steady sobriety and orderly silence" of Sir Thomas's. Although Fanny sits with the Crawfords, she lacks their penchant for gamesmanship: rather than adopting the feelings the game requires, she instead expresses her true feelings by trying to give away her best cards to her brother, William.¹⁰² Although Fanny possesses taste enough to recognize a stylish performance when she sees it, her emotions are too personal and too strong to be readily regulated and channeled into the various games adopted for pleasing social performance. When Mary sends a letter expressing her congratulations for Henry's proposal to Fanny, Fanny judges her own response "excessively ill-written" since "her distress had allowed no arrangement." Fanny expresses this lack of "arrangement" in an earlier discussion with Edmund and Mary when she interjects a "tender apostrophe" about her brother William that, as the narrator notes with light irony, "was very much to the purpose of her own feelings if not of the conversation." Whereas Fanny finds it difficult to control her emotions sufficiently to respond even to misplaced congratulations or impersonal conversations, Mary, in direct contrast, performs with remarkable grace under fire only moments after the man she loves explains at length why he no longer loves her.¹⁰³ Mary's poise in conversation is absent not only in Fanny, but Edmund, who possesses none "of

¹⁰² The novel emphasizes Henry's inability to coach the sincere and tender-hearted Fanny to invest fully in the spirit of the card game: "he had yet to inspirit her play, sharpen her avarice, and harden her heart, which, especially in any competition with William, was a work of some difficulty."

¹⁰³ Edmund describes Mary's impressive struggle to retain her composure in response to his brutal and potentially heart-breaking honesty: "She was astonished, exceedingly astonished—more than astonished. I saw her change countenance. She turned extremely red. I imagined I saw a mixture of many feelings: a great, though short struggle; half a wish of yielding to truths, half a sense of shame, but habit, habit carried it. She would have laughed if she could. It was a sort of laugh, as she answered, 'A pretty good lecture, upon my word. Was it part of your last sermon? At this rate you will soon reform everybody at Mansfield and Thornton Lacey; and when I hear of you next, it may be as a celebrated preacher in some great society of Methodists, or as a missionary into foreign parts.'"

the arts of flattery or the gaieties of small talk.” Like Fanny, Edmund recognizes his distance from the standard of agile performance set by the Crawfords, describing himself as “a very matter-of-fact, plain-spoken being, [who] may blunder on the borders of a repartee for half an hour together without striking it out.” The most dramatic foil to the Crawfords’ refined performance, however, is neither Edmund nor Fanny, but Fanny’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Price. When visiting Portsmouth, Fanny recognizes their distance not only from the order and serenity of Mansfield Park, but from the manners and style exemplified by the Crawfords. Mrs. Price, who has “no talent” and “no conversation,” and Mr. Price, who has “no curiosity, and no information beyond his profession,” both lack the verve and polish of manners adopted to entertain and amuse. In this respect the Price parents parallel the unfortunate Mr. Rushworth, who dooms Maria to listen to “the repeated details of his day’s sport, good or bad, his boast of his dogs, his jealousy of his neighbours, his doubts of their qualifications, and his zeal after poachers”: like Fanny’s parents, Mr. Rushworth does not possess the ability to distance himself from his immediate interests in order to flexibly adapt himself to the interests of an audience.

The Crawfords’ skill in entertainment stems not only from their protean performance, but from their accommodating and indiscriminate warmth.¹⁰⁴ Mary describes Henry as “good-nature itself,” after he volunteers to fetch her harp, and Henry’s actions in the novel bear out that description. The Bertram sisters find him “the most agreeable young man [they] had ever known,” recognizing an agreeability that arises not

¹⁰⁴ “From their first encounter at Mansfield where Fanny sat “exactly opposite” Mary, the two are so totally dissimilar that they seem “two distinct orders of being” (355). Fanny is reserved, humble, and obedient; Mary vivacious, often vain, and irreverent of authority. Fanny’s “feelings were very acute” (14), and she “was always more inclined to silence when feeling most strongly” (369). Mary, on the other hand, is a voluble conversationalist- witty, sarcastic, humorous- and is so precisely because she lacks “Fanny’s delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling” (81)” (Weinsheimer 186).

just from entertaining anecdotes but from his ready, if not necessarily lasting, affection. Although Henry's warmth of spirit rather than principle does not go so deep as to attend to the feelings of his rival Mr. Rushworth, his "more than common agreeableness" does decidedly distinguish him from characters who fail to even show interest in others, like Fanny's parents.¹⁰⁵ It is Mary, though, even more so than Henry who displays this quality of ready affection, instinctively promoting others' happiness: as Edmund marvels, "How readily she falls in with the inclination of others! joining them the moment she is asked." Whether Mary is expressing admiration for the Sotherton estate to Maria, complimenting Fanny on all the praise she deserves but does not hear, or "blam[ing] herself ... with all her heart" for speaking ill of Edmund's chosen profession, Mary is warmly sensitive to the feelings of others. No less significant than Fanny's heroic assistance to the crestfallen Mr. Rushworth when he is abandoned by Henry and Maria, Mary also offers crucial assistance to Fanny after she is belittled by the contemptuous Mrs. Norris: like Fanny to Mr. Rushworth, Mary expertly supplies distraction, encouragement, and comfort, during a moment of acute distress.

Admittedly, *Mansfield Park* gives some reason to question the depth and rootedness of Mary's affections: her feelings for Edmund are jarred by his chosen profession, her increased intimacy with Fanny results primarily from her "desire of something new," and her loyalty to Fanny is tarnished by the unjustified blame she later

¹⁰⁵ Henry's characteristic mode of friendly attentiveness is displayed when he visits Fanny's family at Portsmouth. Recognizing that his visit is a surprise, Henry "giv[es] her time to recover, while he devot[ing] himself entirely to her mother, addressing her, and attending to her ... with a degree of friendliness, of interest at least, which was making his manner perfect." Henry's politeness contrasts sharply, of course, with the deficiencies of affection Fanny observes both in her mother, "who had ... no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better, no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company that could lessen her sense of such feelings." Henry's attentiveness to Fanny also contrasts directly with that of her father, who "scarcely ever notice[s] her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke."

places on Fanny for Henry's affair.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, for all the difference between Mary's quick affection and Fanny's rooted devotion, it's not evident from the objective expression of each that one standard enjoys strict superiority in the novel. By any measure, Mary is a better friend to Fanny than vice versa. In addition to aiding Fanny after Mrs. Norris's criticism, Mary chastises Edmund for neglecting Fanny during horse-riding, insists that Fanny wear her necklace at a ball, and writes her affectionate letters. In direct contrast to the outpouring of affection from Mary's instinctive good nature, Fanny, excepting a single tearful embrace, holds her feelings remarkably aloof from Mary's. Although Fanny visits frequently after the Bertram sisters leave Mansfield Park, their newfound intimacy has "little reality in Fanny's feelings": even what little pleasure Fanny does derive from Mary's conversation arises at the expense of her solemn judgment.¹⁰⁷ Fanny's relative indifference to Mary can be credited to understandable factors: considering that Julia can't even remain civil to Maria when she competes for Henry's affections, Fanny's relationship to her more successful romantic rival seems almost gracious by comparison. Nonetheless, when contrasted to Mary's continual display of good-will to Fanny, Fanny's often anxious, jealous, and vexed judgments of Mary appear remarkably deficient in good-will. The disproportion between Fanny's

¹⁰⁶ At first glance, one might see Mary's unfair judgment of Fanny for refusing to marry her brother as no better or worse than Fanny's own unfair judgment of Henry for not assisting Mary during horse-riding. Both misjudgments arise from an attempt to defend someone the person loves (Henry, Edmund) at the expense of someone innocent (Fanny, Henry). For accounts of Fanny's uncharitable reasoning during horse-riding see Heyns 6-8, and Wainwright 2014: 64-67.

¹⁰⁷ "Fanny went to her every two or three days: it seemed a kind of fascination: she could not be easy without going, and yet it was without loving her, without ever thinking like her, without any sense of obligation for being sought after now when nobody else was to be had; and deriving no higher pleasure from her conversation than occasional amusement, and that often at the expense of her judgment, when it was raised by pleasantries on people or subjects which she wished to be respected.

feelings toward Mary and Mary's toward her is foregrounded most clearly when Fanny, having just refused Henry's proposal, dreads Mary's ensuing visit:

The promised visit from 'her friend,' as Edmund called Miss Crawford, was a formidable threat to Fanny, and she lived in continual terror of it. As a sister, so partial and so angry, and so little scrupulous of what she said, and in another light so triumphant and secure, she was in every way an object of painful alarm. Her displeasure, her penetration, and her happiness were all fearful to encounter; and the dependence of having others present when they met was Fanny's only support in looking forward to it.

When Edmund refers to Miss Crawford as Fanny's "friend," the term hardly seems to deserve the scare-quotes it receives. If friendship is an earned quality, Mary's actions have done everything possible to deserve the attribution. Any inability to have become genuine friends with Mary would seem to be entirely Fanny's doing. While Mary genuinely enjoys Fanny's company—she cheerfully interrupts her other plans to fuss over Fanny when she is stuck in the rain or seeks advice—Fanny's anxious view of Mary as a "formidable threat" falls obviously short of Mary's instinctive warmth. It's not just that Fanny's anticipation of "continual terror" in Mary's presence contrasts with Mary's delight in Fanny's company: Mary's tasteful recognition of Fanny's best qualities especially contrasts with Fanny's own judgments of Mary as "partial," "angry," and "[un]scrupulous"—attributions that turn out to be wildly disproportionate to Mary's actual behavior when she arrives. Far from chastising Fanny for refusing Henry's proposal, Mary admits candidly that she hasn't the heart to do so, and instead remarks

that she “feel[s] it quite impossible to do anything but love you.” Mary’s speech is “partial” only in the sense of bias in favor of Fanny’s best quality, what Mary describes as the possession of “so much more heart ... than one finds in the world at large.” Although Fanny’s heart is sufficient to provoke a tearful reciprocation to Mary’s outpouring, “as if she had loved Miss Crawford,” the contrast between Fanny’s withdrawn care and Mary’s instinctive affection does not always privilege the former. Although Fanny may have a higher standard of commitment to the relationships she does maintain, Fanny’s very hesitance to value any relationships but those of the past falls short of the instinctive good-nature expressed in Mary’s more mobile affection.

If Mary’s generous feelings ironize Fanny’s reserved loyalties, her candid transparency also ironizes Fanny’s deceptive delicacy. Mary expresses her feelings openly, for instance, in her admission to Edmund and Fanny that her uncle is not her “first favorite in the world.” Although this blunt statement about a caretaker to which she ought to feel dutifully affectionate violates Fanny and Edmund’s delicate sense of propriety, Mary’s candid admissions nevertheless can be read as maintaining a standard that Fanny’s actions do not meet. Mary cheerfully shares her judgments of others in more than one instance: she counsels her brother to remember that Maria is engaged, calls him out for being a “horrible flirt” in front of Mrs. Grant, and admits to Fanny that she initially hated Sir Thomas after the theatricals before coming to admire him.¹⁰⁸ Mary’s open judgments also extend to herself: when she and Edmund keep Fanny waiting for her horse, Mary apologizes openly, admitting that she has “nothing in the world to say for

¹⁰⁸ “Yet, Fanny, do not imagine I would now speak disrespectfully of Sir Thomas, though I certainly did hate him for many a week. No, I do him justice now. He is just what the head of such a family should be. Nay, in sober sadness, I believe I now love you all.”

[her]self,” and that she was “behaving extremely ill.” Although Mary is perhaps a bit presumptuous in expecting forgiveness for what she bluntly admits to be “selfishness” (the disease, in her view, with “no hope of a cure”), Mary’s frank admission of wrongdoing contrasts favorably with Edmund’s much more presumptuous attempt to dismiss the whole incident. (Speaking for Fanny, Edmund assumes that Fanny “could be in no hurry” and, even more, that she has probably benefitted by the delay due to the change in weather). Although Edmund later becomes sensible of his neglect later when he sees firsthand how severely the lack of horse-riding inconveniences Fanny,¹⁰⁹ it is Mary, with her characteristic openness, who is again more direct in voicing judgment both of herself and Edmund. When Mary learns from Edmund how quickly Fanny fatigues when walking, she responds: “How abominable in you, then, to let me engross her horse as I did all last week! I am ashamed of you and of myself, but it shall never happen again.” Here, Mary’s admission of her and Edmund’s failure is unmitigated by any plea to be excused for selfishness. It also helps Fanny to a greater degree than would a more polite route designed to preserve Edmund’s feelings; had Edmund not already realized the extent of his neglect himself, Mary’s openness would help ensure that Fanny’s interests were preserved.

If Mary’s candid admission of wrongdoing contrasts with Edmund’s initial attempt to downplay it, Mary’s transparent judgments contrast even more directly with Fanny’s habit of judging others in secret. Austen’s narrator draws explicit attention to the

¹⁰⁹ Vexed as Edmund was with his mother and aunt, he was still more angry with himself. His own forgetfulness of her was worse than anything which they had done. Nothing of this would have happened had she been properly considered; but she had been left four days together without any choice of companions or exercise, and without any excuse for avoiding whatever her unreasonable aunts might require. He was ashamed to think that for four days together she had not had the power of riding, and very seriously resolved, however unwilling he must be to check a pleasure of Miss Crawford’s, that it should never happen again.

deceptive implications of Fanny's reserve when describing Fanny's reception of Henry's attentions: "Her manner was incurably gentle; and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose." Granted, Fanny's lack of self-awareness of her own manner makes her act of deception excusable, and she does vocalize her real feelings about Henry to Sir Thomas who fails to take her statements with sufficient seriousness. Nevertheless, as Jenny Davidson points out, Fanny's politeness leads to anxiety about the way she appears to others that may appear off-putting and disingenuous to modern readers. While the stuffy modesty adopted by relatively powerless benefactors of patronage like Fanny may have occasionally been a necessity, *Mansfield Park* makes it appear to be a regrettable one.¹¹⁰ The dissonance between Fanny's stern judgments of others and her unassuming behavior is especially off-putting when she masks her judgments from Mary, a person with whom she is on affectionate terms and relatively equal footing. Fanny never gives Mary an inkling either of her feelings for Edmund or of her disapproval of Mary's choices. By keeping her affection for Edmund a secret, Fanny enables Mary to unwittingly wound her feelings and arouse her jealousy; and by keeping her disapproval of Mary's attitudes hidden, Fanny makes it impossible for Mary to earn her trust and respect. When it comes to preserving the integrity of relationships, it's possible to see Mary's cheerful transparency as more effective and admirable than Fanny's polite dissimulation.

V. Conclusion

I've argued, then, that *Mansfield Park* uses techniques of vivification and ironization to invite readers to perceive both strengths and weaknesses of its protagonist's

¹¹⁰ Fanny's vulnerability also explains the dissonance between her privately harsh judgments of her mother when she visits Portsmouth and her anxious desire to nevertheless not "appear above her home."

practice. By foregrounding conspicuous contrasts between the behaviors of its protagonist and its secondary characters, the novel invites readers not only to appreciative views of Fanny's disciplined, sincere, modest, and loyal behavior, but also critical views of her comparatively passive, unrefined, self-abasing, and reserved behavior.

To close, I want to briefly consider the implications of these contrasting rhetorical techniques for existing debates on *Mansfield Park*. First, I hope to have shown that the presence of vivification in the novel lends credence to the readings of critics who glean Aristotelian ethical discriminations from the novel's treatment of its characters. By depicting characters as they enact and fail to enact virtues, the novel continues in the Aristotelian mode of earlier novels like *Sense and Sensibility*, inviting its implied reader to discriminate between superior and inferior expressions of virtues such as discipline and sincerity as they are practically enacted. Because characters in *Mansfield Park* express qualities that are not merely different, but "different inside the same genus," or conceptually parallel along a given virtue spectrum, vivifying character-contrasts can inform the implied readers' ethical judgments about situations in which virtues were well or poorly applied (Ryle 7). As one early reviewer of Jane Austen justly observed, "We know not whether Miss Austen ever had access to the precepts of Aristotle, but there are few, if any, writers of fiction who have illustrated them more successfully" (qtd in Gallop 97). Due to the presence of vivification in the novel, it is possible to see how critics have interpreted the novel to be one-sided in its judgments: Bonaparte associates Edmund's choice of Fanny over Mary as his perception of "the true nature of the good," and Trilling views the novel's depiction of Henry Crawford's moral detachment as demonstrating that "Baseness' leads only to baseness" (*Sincerity and Authenticity* 78). The moments of

vivifying contrast in the novel invite readers to assess comparatively virtuous and base behavior in accordance with a single set of coherent standards.

An ethical attitude that seeks to discriminate between the behavior of characters who do and do not express right virtue has further justification beyond the presence of vivifying character-contrasts. This Aristotelian way of conceiving virtue is also rhetorically reinforced by the novel's conclusion which rewards its protagonists' expressions while punishing more peripheral characters. For example, Fanny's expressions of discipline, sincerity, modesty, and loyalty are rewarded with a marriage to Edmund, while characters who do not express Fanny's virtues, including Maria, Julia, Mrs. Norris, and the Crawfords are all punished by the events of the plot to varying degrees. The vain adulteress, Maria, and the encourager of her vanity, Mrs. Norris, are both exiled from Mansfield Park. Likewise, the philandering Henry, who lacks Fanny's sincerity and discipline, loses his chance to be with Fanny after his affair with Maria. Finally, the flippant Mary Crawford also loses Edmund's love and respect after failing to appreciate the gravity of Henry's actions. The rhetorical effect of the vivifying character-system and the conclusion's heavy-handed distribution of novelistic justice both suggest that *Mansfield Park* echoes rather than transcends the Aristotelian character-systems of other novels.

While an Aristotelian conception of ethics offers a powerful framework for explaining the significance of the novel's character-system and its distribution of poetic justice, it offers little help in explaining the interpretive problem that this chapter began by discussing: why have ethically-minded critics been so divided about the protagonist of *Mansfield Park*? Given that other Austen novels also use a combination of vivifying

character-systems and poetic justice to reinforce a single set of virtues modeled by protagonists, the unusually polarizing status of *Mansfield Park* requires a different explanation. This chapter argued that divided judgments are built into the moral intuitions elicited by the novel's character-system, and specifically into those triggered by the set of contrasts between Fanny's behavior and that of Mary and Henry Crawford. Through a close analysis of some moments of conspicuous ethical contrast, I made the case that the novel does not only use character-contrasts to vivify Fanny's actions but also to ironize them. Rather than functioning only as negative foils in *Mansfield Park*, deficient in Fanny's values, I attempted to show that Crawfords function as dialectical counterprinciples who express antithetical values of their own. That is to say, in *Mansfield Park*, contrasts between Fanny and the Crawfords do more than privilege Fanny's practices at the expense of "flatten[ed]," and "fragment[ed]" minor characters such as Maria and Julia Bertram (Woloch 55).¹¹¹ Insofar as Henry and Mary express vivacity rather than passivity, theatricality rather than stodginess, confidence rather than self-abasement, and openness rather than reserve, they signify Austen's creation of an unusual type of secondary character whose antithetical expressions of virtue occur at the protagonist's expense. The ironizing contrasts between the Crawfords and Fanny Price suggest that there is no character in *Mansfield Park* like Elinor Dashwood or Elizabeth Bennet who exhibits an Aristotelian mean between extremes. Rather than foregrounding one exemplary character who displays the highest degree of virtues relevant to every situation, the novel depicts admirable characters who specialize in virtues that others do not match.

¹¹¹ See Woloch 47-55.

By depicting primary and secondary characters in this antithetical way, Austen does not just make the rhetoric of her novel difficult to parse for critics, but also begins to press the evolving novel form to cultivate a new kind of judgment in readers. To make sense of the character-system of *Mansfield Park*—to feel moral intuitions that harmonize with the rhetorical effect of particular scenes—readers must practice making evaluative judgments that navigate between incommensurable standards. The potential ethical effects of this mode of characterization are significant: Austen’s juxtaposition of Fanny and Edmund’s sincerity alongside Mary and Henry’s stylishness does not just facilitate Aristotelian *phronesis* in readers but Hegelian self-consciousness. Despite its one-sided ending, *Mansfield Park* invites readers to perceive ethical practices less in terms of degrees of excellence according to a single scale, than in terms of dialectical tensions between antithetical scales. In harmony with the philosophical methods of her historical contemporary Hegel, Austen’s novel presents the discovery of moral insight as hinging upon readers’ ability to perceive “estrangement of what is simple, that is, ...the doubling which posits oppositions” (Hegel 15).¹¹² By challenging readers to perceive oppositions between incommensurable values exhibited by its characters, *Mansfield Park* is ahead of its time and even the rhetorical constraints of its own ending.¹¹³ It requires what J.S. Mill

¹¹² Trilling precedes me in connecting Austen’s fiction with Hegelian dialectics, but argues that *Mansfield Park* is actually the least dialectical of Austen’s novels since the novel uses the Crawfords to thematize the dangers of irony (*Sincerity and Authenticity* 77). This apparent contradiction with my own argument stems from my more formal focus that Trilling’s. Although Trilling is right that *Mansfield Park* is the Austenian novel least enamored with dialectics at the level of theme, my claim is that the novel’s character-system makes it the most engaged with dialectics at the level of form. To put my argument in Trilling’s terms, I would say that the character-system of *Mansfield Park* exhibits a dialectical ambivalence between the qualities of single-minded sincerity and dialectical irony itself.

¹¹³ Due to the vivifying and ironizing character-system of *Mansfield Park*, I would maintain that its one-sided conclusion is dissonant with the moral intuitions elicited in readers by the novel’s narration of events. (For a helpful account of the centrality of moral intuition to the experience of reading the Victorian novel, see Rosenthal 2017). In the case of *Mansfield Park*, both Joel Weinsheimer and Michiel Heyns have offered perspicuous takes on why the ending of *Mansfield Park* effectively feels wrong. Both critics argue that the moral intuitions triggered by the novel’s occasionally ironic presentation of Fanny Price and the

would later call a “many-sided” mode of perception to be fully understood. More than forty years before attention to the many-sided mind would emerge within British intellectual life more broadly, *Mansfield Park* presses the novel form to move beyond the analysis of a single virtuous standard approached by various characters to the appreciation of conflicting standards they practically enact.

To be sure, family resemblances to Fanny Price and Henry Crawford’s characterization in *Mansfield Park* can be detected in fiction by Austen’s predecessors and at least one of her contemporaries.¹¹⁴ Successors such as the Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Gaskell also partake to varying degrees in the mode of antithetical characterization visible in *Mansfield Park*.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, it would not be until George Eliot’s fiction that Austen’s vivifying and ironizing depictions of antithetical values enacted in realistic circumstances would be matched. Influenced by her readings of

Bertrams clash with the moral intuitions triggered by the novel’s conclusion. Heyns’s take is worth quoting in full: “If Jane Austen had been less of an artist, she could have kept Fanny within the limits set by her moral scheme, and she could have created a perfectly admirable, perfectly dull heroine like Little Dorrit. But her creative vitality did not allow that, and she created a believable, amusing, but ultimately self-deceived heroine.Somewhat bluntly put, Jane Austen conceived a very serious heroine and ended up by finding her funny. Unfortunately, her moral scheme had not provided for a funny heroine. Fanny’s seriousness was to be vindicated against the superficially attractive light-mindedness of the Crawfords, and any implication that that seriousness was other than wholly admirable would have undermined this schematic opposition. Thus, at the conclusion of her novel Jane Austen had no choice but to suppress such an implication, and to vindicate Fanny’s wrong judgements along with her correct judgments. For this to be held up to us as an example of ‘the sterling good of principle and temper’ [p. 471, Ch. 48] seems to be a sacrifice of Fanny, the created character, to Fanny, the bearer of Jane Austen’s moral burden” (16, 3).

¹¹⁴ Sophocles’s depiction of Antigone and Creon in *Antigone* (441 B.C.), Cervantes’s depiction of Sancho Panza and Don Quixote in *Don Quixote* (1605), and Sir Walter Scott’s depiction of Major Melville and Mr. Morton in *Waverly* (1814), all resemble the mode of antithetical characterization achieved in *Mansfield Park*.

¹¹⁵ Echoes of this mode of antithetical characterization can also be detected in novelists after Austen including Emily Brontë’s depiction of Heathcliff and Edgar Linton in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë’s depiction of St. John Rivers and Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s depiction of Mrs. Thornton and Mr. Hale in *North and South* (1854). Although character-systems in these contemporary texts resemble the many-sided contrasts of *Mansfield Park*, they all differ in degree from what Austen achieves in *Mansfield Park*. *Antigone* and *Don Quixote* do not depict their protagonists acting in circumstances relevant to the lives of modern readers; *Wuthering Heights* does not use its protagonists to enact positive values endorsed by the novel (see Gregory 2004); *Waverly* does not vivify the values of its protagonist; and *Jane Eyre* and *North and South* do not ironize the values of their protagonists.

German idealist philosophy and by mid-century conceptions of Victorian liberalism, Eliot would make use of the antithetical character contrasts in her 1860 novel, *The Mill on the Floss*. My next chapter considers how Eliot incorporates the practice of antithetical characterization first developed in *Mill* into her later masterpiece *Middlemarch* (1874): a novel which depicts the strenuous sympathy of its protagonist, Dorothea Brooke, alongside the impulsive egoism of secondary characters whose significance to the novel's ethical scheme is often overlooked.

Chapter 4: Liberal Evaluation in the Character-System of Middlemarch

I. Introduction

The realist novel has long been viewed as an agent of liberal humanist values—as a tool distinctively suited to cultivating sympathetic views of diverse human practices. According to F.R. Leavis and others, novels invite readers to refine their everyday moral feelings and practical judgments insofar as they depict life with “imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination and judgment of relative human value” (Leavis p. 23).¹¹⁶ Yet claims like Leavis’s raise more questions than they answer: in this liberal view of the novel, what qualities make a given novel’s moral judgments more sympathetic or discriminating than another? What techniques, if any, do novelists use to produce such enlightened value-judgments? And what historical and philosophical influences led novelists to create art designed for this specialized task? Even as scholars from F.R. Leavis to Martha Nussbaum have linked novels with the development of the liberal imagination, the subjective and relatively ahistorical nature of much of this criticism has yet to satisfactorily address the question of what makes the novelistic genre distinctively

¹¹⁶ *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 29. Intersections between liberal ideals and novelistic form are also visible in critical judgments as diverse as Lionel Trilling’s appreciation for the novel’s unparalleled ability to convey “the extent of human variety and the value of this variety” (*The Liberal Imagination* [New York: NYRB Classics, 2008] p. 220); Mikhail Bakhtin celebration of the novel’s capacity to include a “social diversity of speech types” (“Discourse in the Novel,” *The Novel: an Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900–2000*, ed. Dorothy Hale, [Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005 (1935)]: p. 485); and Martha Nussbaum’s assertion that “the moral imagination is encouraged by the ...activity of novel-reading” (*Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990]: p. 166). Insofar as such statements associate novels with ethically sensitive responses to diverse forms of life, they associate the genre, either implicitly or explicitly, with the ends of liberal humanism.

amenable to the cultivation of liberal judgment.¹¹⁷ Even more historically focused studies that read novels alongside liberal philosophy and politics have provided little help in clarifying specific formal features that allow novels to promote liberal habits of mind.¹¹⁸

By reading George Eliot's depiction of characters in *Middlemarch* (1874) alongside John Stuart Mill's account of practical judgment in *On Liberty* (1859), I argue that British realist novels made use of the specific technique of character juxtaposition to promote ideals of mid-Victorian liberalism.¹¹⁹ More specifically, this chapter contends that Eliot uses systematic contrasts between characters in *Middlemarch* to invite her readers to adopt two liberal habits of mind defended by J.S. Mill: a mode of strong evaluation first introduced to English novelists by Jane Austen, and a mode of "many-sided" evaluation especially noticeable in English novelists writing after Eliot (Mill p. 130). Although strong and many-sided evaluation both require the ability to make comparative judgments about practical forms of life, these evaluative postures are in

¹¹⁷ Martha Nussbaum's acknowledgment of the limitations of *Love's Knowledge* could just as easily be applied to Leavis's *The Great Tradition* or Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*. Although Nussbaum describes her project as "rooted in [a] love for certain novels," she concedes that "no claim about novels in general ... could possibly emerge from this book" (p. 23). If the concrete focus of Leavis, Trilling, and Nussbaum on their love of particular novels explain too little about what makes the novel form ethically distinctive, the more abstract focus of Mikhail Bakhtin on concepts like heteroglossia and dialogism has different limitations. Bakhtin's reluctance to discuss specific novels in detail makes it difficult to see what makes particular novels more effective than others in promoting the liberal and humanistic ethos his writing privileges.

¹¹⁸ David Wayne Thomas, Elaine Hadley, and Amanda Anderson, have all analyzed conjunctions between ideals of mid-Victorian liberalism and Victorian novels. For instance, Thomas analyzes Camden Farebrother's cultivation of reflective agency in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (*Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic*, [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004], pp. 7-15); Hadley discusses Septimus Harding's display of disinterestedness in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (*Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*, [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010]: pp. 63-125); and Anderson addresses Daniel Deronda's expression of many-sidedness in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (*The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001]: pp. 119-47). By analyzing how novels use exemplary characters to directly thematize liberal ideals in this way, though, this body of work does not consider how novels promoted such ideals through formal structures in which characters were presented.

¹¹⁹ *Middlemarch*, ed. Gregory Maertz, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004 [1874]); John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869 [1859]).

tension with each other: strong evaluation requires firm practical commitment to a specific good whereas many-sided evaluation requires flexible critical detachment from specific commitments. Among the results of focusing on these dialectically complementary modes of evaluation as they are described in J.S. Mill's philosophy and promoted by Eliot's novel is a new sense of the character-system of *Middlemarch* and, more particularly, the novel's distinctive use of secondary characters to promote flexible ethical thinking in readers.

Bringing together Mill's philosophy with Alex Woloch's concept of the character-system, this chapter will, as in the previous chapter, demonstrate *Middlemarch* depicts vivifying and ironizing examples of character evaluation. In the first section, I show systematic contrasts between Dorothea Brooke and other characters that elicit a strong evaluative stance favorable to the practice of sympathy in readers. By deliberately juxtaposing sympathetic behaviors expressed by the protagonist alongside egoistic behaviors of secondary characters committed to different ways of life, *Middlemarch* invites its implied reader to endorse the specific version of the good life expressed by Dorothea at the expense of indifference to the commitments of characters such as Rosamond Vincy and Edward Casaubon. The remainder of the chapter argues for a more controversial thesis: namely, that *Middlemarch* also ironizes Dorothea, or uses character contrasts to cultivate critical judgments of her sympathetic practice. To make this case, I focus on secondary characters including Will Ladislav, Camden Farebrother, and especially Fred Vincy who all express an ethos of spontaneous enjoyment that contrasts with Dorothea's ethos of disciplined sympathy. Insofar as *Middlemarch* uses the liberated practice of characters like Fred as a positive standard by which to clarify the

comparatively constrained aspects of Dorothea's sympathy, the novel invites many-sided evaluation in its implied reader—that is, a flexible critical stance that perceives the reciprocal advantages and disadvantages of practically opposed commitments.

This paper's focus on Fred Vincy as a positive ethical exemplar is unusual in Eliot criticism. Although Fred Vincy plays an important structural role in *Middlemarch* as the protagonist of the novel's third marriage plot, critics of the novel since Henry James have struggled to account for Fred's prominence in the narrative given his seeming distance from the more serious ethical concerns of Dorothea and Lydgate.¹²⁰ By arguing that Fred expresses an ethos of enjoyment that facilitates readers' critical analysis of the novel's other central characters, this paper helps justify Fred's inclusion in the novel. Insofar as characters like Fred Vincy and Will Ladislaw point readers to ethical deficiencies in the practice of otherwise privileged protagonists, I argue that they function as a specialized mid-Victorian type of secondary character designed to facilitate liberal habits of evaluation in readers.

¹²⁰ Henry James asserts in his 1873 review of *Middlemarch* that “we care less so about Fred Vincy than appears to be expected of us,” and associates Fred's depiction with the tendency of the novel “to make light of the serious elements of the story and to sacrifice them to the more trivial ones” (“Review, *Nation*, August 1866.” *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll, [London: Routledge, 2013]: p. 355). David Wayne Thomas, Bruce Martin, and Robert Scholes follow James in seeing Fred Vincy as a character who has little ethical significance in his own right, viewing him as a negative foil to the novel's favored sympathetic practices. See Thomas 11; Bruce Martin, “Fred Vincy and the Unravelling of *Middlemarch*,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 30, 1 (1994): 3-24; and Robert Scholes, “The Novel as Ethical Paradigm?” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 21, 2/3 (1988): 192.

J. Hillis Miller sees Fred's story as separated from Dorothea's for tonal reasons as well as ethical reasons, asserting that Eliot employs “a lower, pastoral, ironic, comic, or ironic style ... for the courtship of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth” (*Reading for Our Time: “Adam Bede” and “Middlemarch” Revisited*. [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012]: p. 141)—a register which contrasts sharply with the what Hilary Mackie describes as the novel's use of “a classical, if not actually an epic, model for Dorothea” to narrate her story (“The Key to Epic Life?: Classical Study in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.” *Classical World* 103, 1 [2009]: 65).

James Phelan's account of *Middlemarch* offers a notable exception to the critical trend of viewing Fred's narrative as disparate from the novel's overall ethical scheme. As Phelan has it, the kindness that Caleb Garth and Camden Farebrother display to Fred plays a critical role in justifying the narrator's concluding assertion that “the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts” (qtd in *Reading People, Reading Plots*. [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989]: p. 198).

George Eliot had much occasion to integrate the ideas of John Stuart Mill's liberal philosophy into her fictional practice: Eliot edited Mill's essays for the *Westminster Review*, read widely from Mill's *Logic* and *Political Economy*, and paraphrased passages from *On Liberty* in *Daniel Deronda*.¹²¹ To examine *Middlemarch*'s participation in a mid-century conjunction between liberal ethics and novelistic form, I will discuss the concepts of strong and many-sided evaluation in turn: first as they are described in J.S. Mill's *On Liberty* and then as they are promoted by the character-system of *Middlemarch*.

II. Liberal Evaluation in Mill's Philosophy

In his 1859 essay *On Liberty*, J.S. Mill endorses strong evaluative stances when he celebrates the human capacity to select practical commitments on the basis of reflective judgment:

The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. ...He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. ...He must use ...discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. (pp. 105, 106)

¹²¹ For discussions of J.S. Mill's influence on George Eliot, see Avrom Fleishman's *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010): pp. 44-72, 194-6, and Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988): pp. 228-37.

In this passage, Mill describes the human ability to exercise choice through the selection of a specific “plan of life.” For Mill, such existential modes of judgment are evaluative insofar as they require individuals to choose actions based on their “discriminative feeling” and “moral preference.” Such judgments are what Charles Taylor calls “strong” insofar as any commitment adhered to with “firmness and self-control” necessarily precludes equal commitment to other life plans.¹²² For instance, a person firmly committed to a life plan that prioritizes goods like sensitivity and openness will find in practice that they necessarily place a lower priority on antithetical goods like toughness and resolve, or vice versa. Conflicts of strong evaluation can also have political implications: for example, left-leaning voters firmly committed to the value of caring for others may support lessening criminal punishments, and thus neglect competing goods such as fairness.¹²³ Taylor’s concept of strong evaluation captures the inevitability of this kind of hierarchical prioritization in matters of practical judgment. To the extent that we adopt postures of strong evaluation, our acceptance and love of one good affects our evaluations of alternative goods, to the point where “we judge them differently and perhaps experience them quite differently, to the point of possible indifference and, in some cases, rejection” (Taylor p. 70). For Mill and Taylor alike, exercising the human capacity for choice requires discrimination among goods that are essential and non-essential to one’s specific plan of life.

The English novelist most innovative in using characters to promote postures of strong evaluation in readers is not George Eliot, but her predecessor, Jane Austen. As we

¹²² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989): p. 2.

¹²³ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2012): pp. 212-3

explored in the previous chapter, Austen's novels perfected the art of making various value-laden perspectives available to readers who could learn from her novels to make fine discriminations between goods expressed in competing plans of life. By using vivifying contrasts between characters, her novels invite readers to adopt postures of strong evaluation: an energetic endorsement of one good (usually expressed by a major character) at the expense of indifference or even hostility to competing goods (usually expressed by minor characters).

Although critics of Eliot have not yet invoked notions of strong evaluation or the character-system to describe *Middlemarch*, these concepts are implicit in existing readings of Eliot's fiction.¹²⁴ Many scholars acknowledge the way in which *Middlemarch*'s rhetorical emphasis on the sympathy expressed by Dorothea Brooke comes at the expense of goods expressed by secondary characters: Nina Auerbach, Jeremy Tambling, and others have observed the extent to which *Middlemarch* asks readers to feel a forcible contrast between the sympathy that Dorothea Brooke exhibits and the comparative deficiencies in sympathy exhibited by the practices of other characters.¹²⁵ Insofar as *Middlemarch* carefully juxtaposes the generous sympathy expressed by the novel's protagonist with the comparatively egoistic behaviors of secondary characters such as Rosamond Vincy, Fred Vincy, and Edward Casaubon, one could say that the novel asks readers to perceive the lives of its characters through a lens of strong evaluation: a perspective that energetically endorses the good of Dorothea's

¹²⁴ For a reading of Eliot's *Romola* that invokes Alex Woloch's idea of the character-system to analyze the privilege the novel accords to sympathy see Jacob Jewusiak's "Large-Scale Sympathy and Simultaneity in George Eliot's *Romola*," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 54, 4 (2014): 855-858.

¹²⁵ See Nina Auerbach's "Dorothea's Lost Dog," *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Karen Chase (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006): pp. 87-107, and Tambling, Jeremy, "Middlemarch, Realism and the Birth of the Clinic," *ELH* 57, 4 (1990): 939-60.

sympathetic belief while inviting indifferent or antipathetic views toward competing goods such as Rosamond's social respectability, Fred's optimistic spontaneity, or Casaubon's scholarly research.¹²⁶ Through practical contrasts among characters like these, *Middlemarch* invites readers to endorse the mode of sympathy expressed in Dorothea's plan of life with the kind of firmness and conviction privileged by J.S. Mill.

Although Victorians are often associated with the earnest and narrow convictions of strong evaluative stances, mid-century Victorian intellectuals recognized that postures of strong evaluation could have a deleterious effect on social solidarity if left unchallenged. For liberal intellectuals like J.S. Mill and Matthew Arnold, habits of earnest conviction championed by figures like John Wesley and Thomas Arnold required the addition of more open-minded habits of thought to help avoid social division and partisan thinking.¹²⁷ Beginning in the late 1850s in Britain and continuing through the 1870s, liberal intellectuals including Mill, Arnold, and Walter Bagehot supplemented defenses of strong practical conviction with defenses of reflective detachment.¹²⁸ In *On Liberty*, Mill calls this reflective capacity "many-sidedness": a disposition to consider multiple and possibly conflicting evaluations of human practices (p. 83). Rather than one-sidedly perceiving a single kind of good expressed by a given life plan, a Millian liberal also seeks to perceive other goods that tend to be excluded by any given set of commitments. Mill recommends, for example, that persons who tend to value the version

¹²⁶ *Middlemarch* invites readers to adopt postures of strong evaluation favoring sympathy when comparing Dorothea's behavior with various egoistic preoccupations of other characters, including the narrow scholarly obsessions that prevent Edward Casaubon from attunement to the feelings of his young wife, the optimistic self-absorption that prevents Fred Vincy from considering the needs of a hard-working family, and the concern for nice furniture that prevents Rosamond Vincy from supporting her husband when his medical practice is embroiled in scandal.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of Victorian rigidity, see Walter Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957): pp. 161-175

¹²⁸ See Houghton's discussion of "the open and flexible mind" *ibid*, pp. 176-180.

of the good life expressed in “democracy” also consider defenses of “aristocracy,” and likewise for any number of other practically opposed goods, such as “co-operation and ...competition,” “luxury and ... abstinence,” “sociality and individuality,” “liberty and discipline” (p. 86). The process of liberal opinion formation, for Mill, requires this mode of dialectical perception that perceives goods in tension with one’s own favored practical commitments.

III. Many-Sided Evaluations in *Middlemarch*

Written ten years after the publication of *On Liberty*, Eliot’s *Middlemarch* depicts its characters in a manner closely aligned with the liberal habits of evaluation Mill defends. *Middlemarch*’s use of characters to promote many-sided thinking is particularly noticeable in the novel’s favorable juxtaposition of characters who enact an ethos of spontaneous enjoyment alongside more disciplined characters like Dorothea who do not. Such juxtapositions, I argue, do not just invite one-sided appreciation for Dorothea’s self-abnegating sympathy, but a many-sided appreciation for antithetical practices of impulsive spontaneity.¹²⁹

To describe the positive contrast *Middlemarch* draws between the spontaneous ethos expressed by characters like Fred Vincy and Will Ladislaw, and the disciplined ethos expressed by characters like Dorothea, I invoke Michel de Certeau’s distinction between “tactics,” or spontaneous practices that resist authority, and “strategies,” or

¹²⁹ My focus on many-sided judgment in *Middlemarch* extends the work of scholars who have already emphasized the difficulty Eliot’s novels present to readers seeking to take ethically-weighted contrasts between characters at face value. See J. Hillis Miller’s “Narrative and History,” *ELH* (1974): 455–73, David Lodge’s “*Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text,” *Middlemarch: George Eliot*, ed. John Peck (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1992): 45–64, Elizabeth Ermarth’s “Negotiating *Middlemarch*,” *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Karen Chase, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006): pp. 107–33, and Auerbach’s “Dorothea’s Lost Dog,” *ibid.*

deliberate practices that impose authority.¹³⁰ De Certeau conceives of tactics as modes of practical resistance to the modern regimes of discipline described by Michel Foucault. Rather than submitting to modes of bureaucratic, institutional, and cultural authority, tacticians seek out relative liberation from controlling discourses through practices characterized by spontaneity, impulsiveness, and purposelessness. For de Certeau, tactical practitioners of “everyday arts” such as cooking, sewing, and speaking resist controlling imperatives of rationality in favor of spontaneous impulsivity; that is, they accept the possibilities experience offers in the present rather than seeking to control future experience through planning, discipline, and judgment. Although de Certeau’s concepts of tactics and strategy are most commonly used to explain resistance to power in urban settings under late capitalism, these concepts can also be used to analyze resistance to a wide variety of hegemonic regimes throughout history: from industrial practices of organization in twentieth-century Paris or London to religious practices of self-regulation in nineteenth-century English villages.¹³¹

To perceive *Middlemarch*’s appreciation for tactical practices of resistance to discipline, I begin by examining the novel’s critical treatment of its more disciplined characters. Through a combination of ironic discourse, revealing dialogue and action, and

¹³⁰ See Michel de Certeau “*The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 1988). Although I am not aware of previous scholarship that uses de Certeau’s philosophy to analyze Eliot’s fiction, my focus practices of resistance to power in Eliot’s fiction supplements the work of Jeffrey Nunokawa, who has used Irving Goffman’s work to analyze other practices that Eliot’s characters use to resist the coercive pressure of regulatory norms. See “Eros and Isolation: The Antisocial George Eliot,” *ELH* 69, 4 (2002): 835–60.

¹³¹ The narrator of *Middlemarch* calls attention to the importance of resistance to evangelical influence in its description of the Vincy family: “The Vincys had the readiness to enjoy, the rejection of all anxiety, and the belief in life as a merry lot, which made a house exceptional in most county towns at that time, when Evangelicalism had cast a certain suspicion as of plague-infection over the few amusements which survived in the provinces” (152). For more on Eliot’s complicated relationship to ascetic evangelicalism, see Fleishman 12–44.

character juxtaposition, the novel works to elicit dissatisfaction with strategic modes of thought and behavior in its implied reader. The novel's ironic treatment of Rosamond Vincy, to take our first example, invites readers to view her practice as a negative foil not only to Dorothea Brooke's sympathy but also to her brother Fred's tactics. For the discerning reader, Rosamond's quest for the good things in life appears less as a spontaneous improvisation that seizes upon the impulses of the moment, than as a strategic self-presentation designed to achieve calculated aims. In Rosamond's first introduction to Lydgate, the narrator of *Middlemarch* draws attention to the calculated self-regulation Rosamond exhibits through a constantly maintained awareness of others: "Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own" (p. 119). By describing Rosamond as an actress, the narrator emphasizes the way in which her continuing consciousness of others' expectations creates distance between natural feelings prompted by her "own character" and the artificial self-presentation she reveals to others.

The censorship of feeling involved in such theatrical self-presentation is further emphasized in the narrator's description of Rosamond's ensuing flirtations with Lydgate. By observing that Rosamond answers questions in a calculated, knowledgeable way that "a more naïve girl" would not, the narrator calls attention to the thought and artifice that guide Rosamond's interactions (p. 151). The narrator makes use of similarly detached rhetoric to describe Rosamond's effort to conceal her feelings later in the novel when Lydgate's businesslike manner during a house call injures Rosamond's pride:

“Rosamond, made nervous by her struggle between mortification and the wish not to betray it, dropped her chain as if startled, and rose too, mechanically” (p. 259). By telling the reader that Rosamond drops the chain “*as if* startled” rather than out of genuine surprise, the narrator invites scrutiny of the potential artifice of this action as well.¹³² Even though this moment of design is immediately followed by the eruption of genuine tears—glossed by the narrator as a brief “moment of naturalness”—the narrator’s earlier use of the imperfect subjunctive emphasizes Rosamond’s prevailing tendency, even at her least self-controlled, to rely on what Lydgate sees as her “most perfect management of self-contained grace” (p. 259). Such scenes invite the implied reader to view Rosamond’s habitual management as the opposite of tactical work that is “free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” (de Certeau p. 25). Instead of purposeless work with no further aim than creative self-expression, Rosamond’s theatrical self-presentation appears to carry the strategic aim of facilitating her goals, or adding to what the narrator of *Middlemarch* calls “her elegant accomplishments” (p. 235).

If readers are invited to take distance from Rosamond’s calculated interactions with others, they are also invited to take distance from her tendency to promote conformity with socially approved standards. In response to her brother Fred’s assertion that “all choice of words is slang ...mark[ing] a class,” Rosamond asserts that “there is correct English”—a view which both normalizes and reifies speech patterns associated with a dominant social group (p. 105). Rosamond’s investment in preserving markers of class distinction is made particularly conspicuous through the ironized free indirect discourse used to describe her reasons for marrying Lydgate: an outcome she finds

¹³² This analysis is indebted to Maria Su Wang’s discussion of the same scene in “Realism’s Operative Paradox: Character Autonomy vs. Authorial Construction in *Middlemarch*.” *Narrative* 23, 3 (2015): 297.

desirable for the prospect it presents “of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people” (p. 156). The disjunction here between Rosamond’s small-minded aspirations for class advancement and the exaggerated phrase “celestial condition on earth” betray the presence of an implied author who takes ironic distance from such class-bound desires; for informed readers, the distance between Rosamond’s view of people she deems “vulgar” and those of the author who speaks in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede* is significant, indeed.¹³³ Rosamond’s expressed desire to avoid any association with vulgarity is consistent with her attempts elsewhere in the novel to regulate what she sees as abnormal behavior: another habit that the novel subjects to ironic scrutiny. A product of Mrs. Lemon’s finishing school for young ladies, Rosamond carefully avoids unbecoming behavior herself and politely corrects her mother and brother for what she sees as their vulgar expressions (pp. 105, 107). Rosamond is equally quick to enforce conformity with conventional gender roles, both affirming her own embrace of traditionally feminine behaviors (“you will never hear me speak in an unladylike way”) and criticizing the effeminate implications of Fred’s flute playing (“a man looks very silly playing the flute” [pp. 104, 108]). If readers of *Middlemarch* are invited to be amused by the weight Rosamond places on the maintenance of class and gender roles in such trivial matters, they are also invited to speculate as to why it may be important for characters like her brother to resist the terms of her discourse. Rosamond gives voice to a leveling strategic

¹³³ “These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people — amongst whom your life is passed — that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire — for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience.”

rationality insofar as she readily endorses standards that replace the eccentric and unique with what conforms to the approval of accepted social conventions.

Even if she is the most conspicuous strategist in the novel, Rosamond is not the only character in *Middlemarch* whose attitudes and behaviors are subjected to critical scrutiny. *Middlemarch*'s depiction of Rosamond's suitor and eventual husband, Tertius Lydgate, invites readers to adopt similarly critical views of strategic desires for control and status. The negative implications of Lydgate's ethos are expertly clarified and defamiliarized in a telling conversation with the minister Farebrother. After Farebrother advises Lydgate of the need for patience and politeness when seeking to implement medical reforms in the provincial Middlemarch community, Lydgate responds:

“Don't you think men overrate the necessity for humoring everybody's nonsense, till they get despised by the very fools they humor?” said Lydgate, moving to Mr. Farebrother's side, and looking rather absently at the insects ranged in fine gradation, with names subscribed in exquisite writing. “The shortest way is to make your value felt, so that people must put up with you whether you flatter them or not.” (p. 162)

Just as Rosamond attempts to distinguish herself from “vulgar” people through marriage, Lydgate seeks to “make [his] value felt” through professional success. And no less than Rosamond's class aspirations, Lydgate's sharp distinction between “fools” and men like himself who do work of “value,” is immediately subjected to ironic scrutiny by the novel's attention to the image he views while speaking. The picture of “insects ranged in fine gradation” on Farebrother's wall can be taken as a metaphor for Lydgate's hierarchical and status-driven view of the world—a view the implied reader of

Middlemarch is led to understand as more petty and small-minded, or plagued with more “spots of commonness,” than might first appear (144). The questionable nature of Lydgate’s desire to be recognized in *Middlemarch* also manifests in his self-presentation, which the narrator explicitly evaluates as “a little too self-confident and disdainful” (143). Although Lydgate’s ethos expresses a different kind of controlling rationality than Rosamond’s, *Middlemarch* nevertheless invites critical scrutiny of his strategic desire to maintain a hierarchical view of his social world—a desire that includes “its being known (without his telling it) that he was better born than other country surgeons” (144). Instead of preferring tactical spaces of darkness and ambiguity that disrupt hierarchies and allow play within the foundations of power, Lydgate articulates a preference for maintaining order and distinction in the social world—a preference that, in passages like these, the implied author of *Middlemarch* does not appear to share.¹³⁴

If *Middlemarch* reveals strategic costs in the practices of Rosamond and Lydgate, it also reveals such costs in the practice of its most privileged character, Dorothea. A sequence near the novel’s conclusion, even as it attempts to emphasize sympathy’s advantages, also points to troubling strategic implications of Dorothea’s practice: a practice which depends upon a form of strenuous self-policing directly at odds with a tactical reliance on impulse and play. The sequence in question begins when Dorothea, who loves Will Ladislav, pays a visit to Rosamond. She finds Will and Rosamond speaking together in an emotional situation, seemingly confirming the rumor that they are having an affair. Keeping her emotions in check, Dorothea leaves silently and weeps alone as her darkest fears are confirmed. The next morning, she attempts to suppress an

¹³⁴ For de Certeau’s discussion of the tactical peasants of Pernambuco who refuse to objectify and totalize their views of experience, see *Practice* 15-8.

“outleap of jealous indignation and disgust” by thinking of Rosamond’s husband, Lydgate:

All the active thought with which she had before been representing to herself the trials of Lydgate’s lot, and this young marriage union which, like her own, seemed to have its hidden as well as evident troubles—all this vivid sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance. (p. 605)

Here, Dorothea’s “vivid sympathetic experience,” is presented as a kind of energizing “power” that provides her with resolve and courage, but at a price. Dorothea’s expression of sympathy is made possible only by first stifling the powerful feelings implicit in the “outleap of jealous indignation and disgust” she instinctively feels. While Dorothea’s sympathetic exercise makes her interpretations of the emotions of others refined and precise, like “an acquired knowledge,” the passage invites readers to see the way in which this sympathetic power also negates personal emotions—those experienced in “the day of ...ignorance” she must now leave behind. Like Dorothea’s conscientious qualms over accepting her mother’s jewelry or her desire to renounce the pleasurable activity of horseback riding, Dorothea’s exercise of sympathy is associated here with self-abnegation—a kind of “coercion” that results from the “intensity of her religious disposition” (p. 51).

The suppression of personal impulses required by Dorothea’s exercise of sympathy is more directly emphasized soon after when Dorothea speaks to Rosamond of her husband Lydgate’s troubles. Dorothea is reminded of “the grounds of obstruction and

hatred” between her and Rosamond, but, worried that jealousy might dictate her response, exerts strenuous effort to control her emotions:

She was beginning to fear that she should not be able to suppress herself enough to the end of this meeting ...She tried to master herself with the thought that this might be a turning-point in three lives— not in her own; no, there the irrevocable had happened, but— in those three lives which were touching hers with the solemn neighborhood of danger and distress.
(p. 611)

Here, Dorothea’s self-policing in the service of the ideal of sympathy appears to readers as demanding as any of de Certeau’s strategies. The words “fear,” “suppress,” and “master” signify the weight of the constraint Dorothea imposes upon herself. This “solemn” effort at self-mastery realizes a rigorous model of virtue at the expense of expressing human emotion. Instead of giving free play to spontaneous impulse, Dorothea instead directs her will in accordance with a kind of religious or “scriptural” obligation—one “that seek[s] to create ...conformity with abstract models” of behavior (de Certeau p. 29). Censoring her impulses of personal feeling until they conform to an idealized standard, here, as elsewhere in the novel, Dorothea is “habitually controlled by ...thoughtfulness for others” (p. 179).

If *Middlemarch* uses Dorothea’s exchange with Rosamond to suggest that sympathetic regulation comes at the cost of emotional spontaneity, the novel also uses this scene to reveal the way in which sympathy instantiates a moral hierarchy. After witnessing the “self-forgetful ardor” Dorothea displays when offering to assist Lydgate, the narrator describes Rosamond as feeling “something like a bashful timidity before a

superior” (p. 610). This perceived sense of moral inferiority manifests as a sense of moral coercion: Rosamond finds herself “urged by a mysterious necessity to free herself from something that oppressed her as if it were blood guiltiness” (p. 613). As in the previous scene, the narrator’s choice of rhetoric once again places emphasis on the constraining effects of Dorothea’s actions: Rosamond immediately feels “oppressed” rather than liberated by Dorothea’s act of moral superiority. The novel’s emphasis on the hierarchical implications of Dorothea’s sympathetic practice are not limited to this scene alone: Celia is hurt by the “assumption of superiority” implicit in Dorothea’s resistance to accepting their mother’s jewels, and Casaubon is offended by the pity Dorothea feels for him when his heart condition worsens (pp. 38, 349-50).

Along with Rosamond’s theatricality and Lydgate’s science, Dorothea’s sympathy is presented through ironizing rhetoric, revealing dialogue, and character juxtapositions that all invite readers to take critical distance from its strategic implications. As different as the practices of these characters are, they are all shown to rely on techniques of emotional regulation which result in hierarchical understandings of their social world.¹³⁵ I now want to explore *Middlemarch*’s depiction of characters whose practices are valorized by the novel’s implied author precisely for their expressions of tactical resistance to such processes.

Middlemarch offers generous depictions of several characters who enact an ethos of enjoyment at odds with the strategic ethos enacted by characters like Rosamond, Lydgate, and Dorothea. In the novel’s opening scene Celia Brooke’s common sense is

¹³⁵ For more on connections between sympathy and repression in Eliot’s fiction see John Kucich’s *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens*, (Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 1987).

favorably juxtaposed with her sister Dorothea's self-abnegation as they dispute the extent to which Christian women are permitted to wear jewelry: by defending the legitimacy of worldly pleasure against the intrusion of religious regulation, Celia expresses her own version of tactical resistance to Puritanic discipline. The reverend Camden Farebrother is another character whose embrace of spontaneity is favorably contrasted with modes of discipline enacted by other characters. A foil to more strategic characters such as Nicholas Bulstrode and Tertius Lydgate, Farebrother displays minimal concern for how he is perceived by others and equally little interest in regulating others' perceptions of his behavior: his conversations with Lydgate display "a desire to do with as little pretence as possible," and he frequents whist tables even though this makes him appear "too lax for a clergyman" (pp. 170-1). The most conspicuous foil to the mode of discipline embraced by Dorothea is neither Celia nor Farebrother, however, but Will Ladislaw. Will describes the sense of responsibility Dorothea feels for the well-being all people as a "fanaticism of sympathy" and he defends an antithetical ethos of carefree enjoyment by arguing that "the world is being taken care of when you feel delight" (p. 200). Ladislaw's amateur excursions into painting early in the novel express this ethos of enjoyment particularly well. Painting because he takes pleasure in it rather than out of a desire to add to his accomplishments, Ladislaw's dilettantism enacts a comparatively liberated alternative to the more strategic labors of characters such as Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate.

While all these characters enact alternatives to the modes of discipline criticized by the novel, none of these characters fully succeeds in avoiding complicity with strategic thought and behavior: Celia's careful concern for social conventions, Farebrother's selfless act of renunciation, and Will's fastidious attention to his honor implicate each in

degrees of strategic self-regulation. Given the concern of these other characters to adhere to various forms of social and moral authority, the character who enacts the clearest positive alternative to strategic modes of discipline is the idle young gentleman, Fred Vincy.

IV. The Tactician of Middlemarch

The adolescent Fred Vincy might seem an unlikely candidate for playing a serious role in the novel's overall ethical scheme: indeed, Fred's own comedic narrative trajectory from playful idleness to disciplined roles of responsible farmer and devoted husband might suggest that the novel's implied author cares little about the ethical investments of his youth. However, the novel's attentive presentation of the playful ethos Fred enacts as a young man suggests that this ethos has a possibly greater significance within the novel's overall ethical scheme. By resisting strategic practices and perspectives of other characters in the novel, the young Fred Vincy allows readers to perceive a relatively liberated and non-judgmental alternative to repressive and hierarchical modes of behavior criticized in the novel.

The most notable feature of Fred's behavior early in the novel and the ethos it expresses, is that it is easy. Rather than straining under the weight of distant purposes or grand aspirations, Fred's practice is less regulated and controlled than that of the novel's other characters. The narrator describes Fred variously as: "of a hopeful disposition"; as "a spirited young fellow, with a good appetite for the best of everything"; and as being "so good-tempered that if he looked glum under scolding, it was chiefly for propriety's sake" (pp. 131, 121, 206). The terms emphasized here, "disposition," "appetite," and temper are unconnected with the burdens of deliberate analysis or disciplined practice.

Like de Certeau's tactics, Fred's practice is "habitual and nonreflective"—not an art of conscious intentions and settled purposes, but "of manipulating and enjoying" which embraces a "mobility of goals and desires" that offer themselves in the moment (de Certeau p. xxii). The novel's presentation of Fred's ethical approach in such moments make it visible as a more impulsive and less deliberate alternative to the strenuous forms of self-control that we've seen exhibited in Rosamond's theatrical artifice and Dorothea's self-abnegating sympathy.

Given that Fred's egoism is presented as instinctive, it might be easy for informed readers to group Fred along with Eliot's other memorable egoists who are controlled by their wayward desires, such as Hetty Sorrell in *Adam Bede*. In sharp contrast to Eliot's depiction of Hetty, though, Fred is presented to Eliot's readers as a character who possesses a coherent and principled commitment to a specific plan of life. Just as readers of *Middlemarch* are invited to understand Lydgate's aspiration to become a hero of science or Dorothea's aspiration to achieve spiritual perfection, they are invited to understand Fred's aspiration to enjoy life's pleasures: "usually bright and careless," Fred's eyes convey a readiness "to give attention to anything that held out a promise of amusement" (p. 526). *Middlemarch* presents Fred's pursuit of amusement not as just something he happens to like, but as something he aspires to like. We are told that Fred thinks of himself as a "man ...of pleasure," and that he implicitly views himself as having a "right to be free from anything disagreeable" (pp. 525, 206). Such passages create a picture of Fred as a reflective being, committed to a distinctive ethos of strong evaluation that readers can learn to understand and potentially appreciate. Although several of these descriptions of Fred's consciously endorsed plan of life are placed in a context that

subjects his beliefs to ironizing scrutiny,¹³⁶ one notable exception occurs in the narrator's favorable description of the Vincy family, which adheres to an ethos that Fred best expresses: "The Vincys had the readiness to enjoy, the rejection of all anxiety, and the belief in life as a merry lot, which made a house exceptional in most county towns at that time, when Evangelicalism had cast a certain suspicion as of plague-infection over the few amusements which survived in the provinces" (p. 152). In contrast to the narrow-minded asceticism of Evangelicalism, (which associates harmless "amusements" with the dangers of "plague-infection"), the Vincy family, and Fred in particular, embrace an ethos that rejects anxiety in favor of a "readiness to enjoy."

The word Eliot's narrator applies to Fred's love of enjoyment, which includes an affection for gambling at dice, is "hopefulness": a quality that could be associated with the excitement of improvisation, or the pleasure involved "in making a throw of any kind" (p. 209). The novel's appreciation for Fred's ethos of purposeless spontaneity is not just conveyed through charitable descriptions of his carefree attitude, but through carefully selected dialogue through which Fred offers articulate criticisms of strategic behaviors. For example, it is not difficult to intuit that the implied author of *Middlemarch* shares Fred's distaste for the "finicking notions" of Rosamond's finishing school which are incompatible with Fred's taste for improvisation (p. 106). And given the narrator's own critical evaluation of Lydgate's "disdainful" attitude, Fred's criticism of Lydgate for being a "prig...[who] is always making you a present of his opinions" hits the mark with similar force (pp. 106, 107). For the implied reader, Fred's justified criticisms of characters whose behaviors and judgments seek to regulate behavior and preserve status

¹³⁶ For instance, Fred's gambling failures provide context that ironizes his belief that "the prospect of success is certain," and his assumption that events can be fashioned "according to desire" (209).

lend indirect legitimacy to the contrasting ethical approach he embodies. In addition to his conscious embrace of experiences of enjoyment, Fred's ethical approach also involves a stance of non-judgmental tolerance. Fred articulates this relaxed approach to matters of value judgment in an explanation to Farebrother of why he is not prepared to argue against the doctrines of his clerical school: "I think it would be rather ridiculous in me to urge scruples of that sort, as if I were a judge" (p. 413). By juxtaposing the pride implicit in Rosamond and Lydgate's approach to matters of judgment with the simple humility and tolerance of Fred's approach, the implied author of *Middlemarch* makes the latter stance appear more attractive. The rhetorical effect of this contrast is to invite readers of *Middlemarch* to resist strategic discourses of "transparency" and "totality" that adjudicate between acceptable and unacceptable modes of behavior in favor of tactical approaches like Fred's—approaches that occur within "spaces of darkness," or uncertainty, and thus allow for flexibility and mobility (de Certeau p. 18).

Insofar as Fred successfully expresses a tactical plan of life that other characters do not, his depiction makes visible the ethical complexity in Eliot's treatment of secondary characters. Fred Vincy's practice, like the that of Celia Brooke, Will Ladislaw, and Camden Farebrother, successfully expresses values of enjoyment, mobility, impulsiveness, and tolerance that contrast favorably with the comparatively repressed, disciplined, and hierarchical practices of more strategic characters. Rather than functioning only to reinforce a one-sided evaluative distinction between sympathy and egoism, the juxtaposition of Fred and Dorothea also privileges Fred's tactical spontaneity at the expense of Dorothea's strategic discipline.

V. Conclusion

Eliot's depiction of peripheral characters like Fred who exceed the terms of her novels' ostensible moral schemes is not just an accident of the creative process but a self-conscious intention of her fictional practice. The much-discussed description of the pier glass in chapter twenty-seven of *Middlemarch* explicitly describes the kind of conflicting evaluative modes that we've seen exhibited in the novel's character-system. Eliot's narrator uses the metaphor of a candle to describe the function of individual perspectives in arranging and ordering personal experience while also suggesting that any given arrangement is only one of many possibilities:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent. (p. 232)

The narrator's description of the way that a candle's light supplies an ordered view of scratches in the pier glass—illuminating “concentric circles” that appear as satellites in relation to a “little sun”—can be viewed as a metaphor for strong evaluative perspectives that privilege goods like “sympathy” or “tactics” at the expense of other goods. From such perspectives, the good of primary importance in a person's life appears as a little

sun, and the view from which that sun is illuminated determines the way in which the actions of oneself and others, the scratches on the pier glass, are interpreted. The candle's illumination is akin to the clarity afforded by what Eliot's narrator here calls "egoism," or what I've been calling "strong evaluation": that is, a perspective that interprets human behavior in light of a single good of primary importance while allowing alternative goods to be seen dimly or left in darkness.

Although I began this paper by describing strong evaluative contrasts in *Middlemarch*'s character-system that illuminate the central "sun" of Dorothea's sympathy, I have also explored the extent to which relations between characters make visible a different tactical perspective, from whence "the lights and shadows ...fall with a certain difference" (*Middlemarch* p. 193). The novel's depictions of characters like Fred, Will, Dorothea, and Lydgate are "many-sided" in this way: less like a candle narrowly illuminating a single meaning than a prism susceptible to illumination in light of multiple meanings.

Although Eliot's use of the character juxtapositions borrows from older literary predecessors and traditions, her use of many-sided character juxtapositions in novels like *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Middlemarch* (1874), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876) gave distinct expression to ideals of mid-century Victorian liberal philosophy.¹³⁷ Along with other Victorian novels such as Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875) and George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), Eliot's *Middlemarch* employs systematic

¹³⁷ As a formal technique, Eliot's use of antithetical character foils is anticipated by Sophocles's juxtaposition of Antigone's familial piety with Creon's rational statescraft in *Antigone* (441 BC), Miguel de Cervantes's juxtaposition of Don Quixote's idealistic chivalry with Sancho Panza's skeptical practicality in *Don Quixote* (1605), and especially by Jane Austen's juxtaposition of Henry Crawford's energetic theatricality and Fanny Price's disciplined sincerity in *Mansfield Park* (1814).

oppositions between characters to promote flexible habits of evaluation in readers.

Insofar as novels like *Middlemarch* use character contrasts not only to invite strong commitment to particular plans of life but also to invite critical reflection on such plans, such novels ask readers to adopt liberal habits of mind. To fully understand and evaluate *Middlemarch*'s depictions of character, readers must learn to practice many-sided judgment.

Chapter 5: Henry James at the Ethical Turn: Imagination and Discrimination in *The Ambassadors*

I. Introduction

In *The Great Tradition*, F.R. Leavis suggests that *The Ambassadors* “doesn't belong ... with the other late 'great' novels.” Leavis is not alone in viewing *The Ambassadors* as distant from a Victorian realist tradition that involves readers in “moral discrimination and judgment of relative human value” (23). An influential tradition of ethical criticism has praised James's novels less for its discriminating judgment than for its refusal of judgment. This chapter begins by reviewing the work of Levinasian, deconstructive, and even Aristotelian critics who associate James's fiction, and the ethical import of reading literature more broadly, with an array of related values including particularity, impulsiveness, and indeterminacy. I argue here that *The Ambassadors* invites readers to adopt a more cognitively oriented approach to the novel: one that does not refuse judgment for feeling but rather subjects feeling to the labor of the concept. To this end, I emphasize the debt of *The Ambassadors* to an expressive realist aesthetic whose techniques of characterization depend upon abstraction, analysis, and understanding. Attending in particular to the novel's opposition between Lambert Strether's imagination and Maria Gostrey's discrimination, I show that *The Ambassadors* uses its character-system to both clarify and test the views of its characters, and by extension, its readers. By building dialectical oppositions like these into *The Ambassadors*, James does not disrupt structures of thought with immediate feeling, so much as he shapes immediate feelings into structures of thought. It is only because

Maria's practice of discriminating judgment functions as a logical antithesis to Strether's impulsive imagination that readers can grasp the full significance of each practice. By emphasizing how James's fiction facilitates thoughts which attend to the whole, rather than just provoking feelings which attend to the particular, this chapter aims to expand both received understandings of James's fiction and of ethical approaches to literary criticism more broadly.¹³⁸

II. Henry James at the Ethical Turn

If the insights of the ethical turn have been changing literary studies over the past three decades, attention to Henry James's fiction has played a significant role in that change.¹³⁹ For many influential ethical critics, including Judith Butler, Adam Zachary Newton, J. Hillis Miller, and Martha Nussbaum, James has figured prominently. Not only does James's fiction offer a site where ethical criticism can be practiced, but it also helps some of these critics articulate what Dorothy Hale describes as a "surprisingly unified"

¹³⁸ If Lambert Strether's imagination is the subject of The Ambassadors, James's construction of characters who oppose Strether's imagination exemplifies the kind of reflective treatment J.S. Mill recommends in On Liberty: "The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind" (Mill, John Stuart. On Liberty, fourth edition, (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), p. 39). My argument is that Maria Gostrey's perspective supplies a different "character of mind" which contributes to The Ambassadors's systematic and reflective project—the project of helping readers "approach ...knowing the whole" of James's central subject.

¹³⁹ For summaries of the ethical turn in literary studies see Buell, Lawrence. "Introduction: In Pursuit of Ethics." PMLA, 114.1 (1999), 7-19; Eskin, Michael. "Introduction: The Double 'Turn' to Ethics and Literature?" Poetics Today 25.4 (2004), 557-572; Phelan, James. Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 21; and Fessenbecker, Patrick. "In Defense of Paraphrase." New Literary History 44.1 (2013), 118-19. Critics cited by all four who draw extensively on James's fiction include Wayne Booth, J. Hillis Miller, Martha Nussbaum, and Adam Zachary Newton.

For examples of other ethically inflected criticism which attends to Jamesian form also see Hale, Dorothy J. Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Pippin, Robert B. Henry James and Modern Moral Life. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Butler, Judith. "Values of Difficulty" in Just Being Difficult?: Academic Writing in the Public Arena. ed. Jonathan D. Culler and Kevin Lamb. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 199-215.

account of the ethical effects of reading literature.¹⁴⁰ The value of Jamesian form, according to Hale's meta-analysis, depends upon its capacity to offer a "knowledge that is beyond reason, that is of the emotions, and that is so intuitive as to seem a bodily knowing" ("Aesthetics and the New Ethics," p. 903).

One significant figure in this argument about Jamesian form is Judith Butler, whose primary engagement with the ethical turn emphasizes the importance of Levinas.¹⁴¹ For Butler, the ethical invitation of Jamesian fiction lies in the suspensions of judgment it requires of its readers. As Butler sees it, the refusal of a novel like *Washington Square* to explain Catherine Sloper's decision to reject Morris Townsend provokes us to "understand the limits of judgment and to cease judging, paradoxically, in the name of ethics, to cease judging in a way that assumes we already know in advance what there is to be known."¹⁴² Through this process, according to Butler, "we learn something about the limits of our ways of knowing; and in this way we experience as well the anxiety and the promise of what is different, what is possible, what is waiting for us if we do not foreclose it in advance" ("The Values of Difficulty," p. 209).

Although Adam Zachary Newton views the representative dimension of Jamesian narrative, especially as discussed in his prefaces, to be at odds with the kind of Levinasian ethos Butler sees in James, Newton has also emphasized the way in which James's fiction opens spaces for encounters with alterity.¹⁴³ By focusing on stories like

¹⁴⁰ Hale, Dorothy J. "Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century." *PMLA* 124.3 (2009), 896–905.

¹⁴¹ See Butler, Judith. "Ethical Ambivalence." *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 15-29.

¹⁴² Butler, Judith. "Values of Difficulty" in *Just Being Difficult?: Academic Writing in the Public Arena*. Ed. Jonathan D. Culler and Kevin Lamb. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 208.

¹⁴³ Newton's argument about the ethical effects of Jamesian representation is made primarily through attention to techniques James describes in his prefaces; see Newton, Adam Zachary. *Narrative Ethics*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 130-132.

“The Real Thing,” *The Aspern Papers*, and *In the Cage*, where James foregrounds ethical limitations and challenges to his own aesthetics, Newton presents Jamesian narrative as offering self-conscious resistance to the principles of its construction. Newton attends to moments in James’s fiction, like the narrator’s encounter with Juliana in *The Aspern Papers*, where artistic interpretation encounters the resistance of the Levinasian face which “will not dissimulate its forms, will not disclose itself” and “remains defiantly ‘impenetrable’” (*Narrative Ethics*, 149-150). Like Judith Butler, Newton thus draws attention to the interest of James’s fiction in the “hard facts of distance, separation, and alterity” that cause its meanings to remain opaque to readers (*Narrative Ethics* p. 129).

J. Hillis Miller’s focus on speech acts in Henry James coheres closely with Butler and Newton’s focus on alterity.¹⁴⁴ For Miller, too, the interest and import of engaging with Jamesian narrative does not lie in its capacity to promote understanding of persons or events, but in its dramatization of a potentially bewildering responsibility to judge in the wake of “the impossibility of knowing and possessing” the objects a narrative depicts (*Literature as Conduct*, p. 19). The “complex integument of performative utterances, gestures, and even thoughts” Miller sees in James reveals indeterminacy and courts ambiguity (*Literature as Conduct*, p. 64). For Miller, moments like Isobel’s decision to return to Osmond in *Portrait of a Lady* invite antithetical explanations that render “the reading situation ‘undecidable’” (*Literature as Conduct*, p. 75). Miller uses such moments to suggest that the ethical effects of Jamesian fiction do not involve offers of understanding to the reader, but encounters with the difficulty, and perhaps even impossibility of understanding. Both Levinasian and deconstructive ethical approaches to

¹⁴⁴ Hillis Miller cites Butler’s reading of *Washington Square* approvingly in *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 332.

James, then, for all their differences, emphasize the capacity of his fiction to trouble, or overturn the possibility of informed judgment. For these approaches, Jamesian narrative has this ethical effect by a twofold movement: it invites responsibility for making moral judgments while simultaneously staging confrontations—either with alterity or with the “performative efficacy” of language—that render such responsibility problematic or unfulfillable (*Literature as Conduct*, p. 8).

Like Butler and Newton’s emphasis on alterity or Miller’s emphasis on language, Leo Bersani’s emphasis on desire in Henry James has also foregrounded moments of indeterminacy and opacity that have made Henry James’s fiction of interest to the ethical turn. For Bersani, moments of unintelligibility in James—including Isobel Archer’s return to Osmond—set James at odds with a tradition of nineteenth-century realism devoted to revealing “governing pattern[s] of significance” which give coherent form to behavior.¹⁴⁵ On this reading, James’s fiction commands attention insofar as it distances itself from the realist “commitment to intelligible, 'full' characters” and instead depicts “the stimulating improbabilities of behavior which would resist being ‘placed’ and interpreted in a general psychological or formal structure” (*A Future for Astyanax*, p. 67).

Bersani’s characterization of anti-realist tendencies in James’s fiction poses an interesting question for the use of James’s fiction by ethical critics. It may strike us as odd that, in outlining James’s contribution to the ethical turn, critics have focused almost exclusively on those aspects of his work that place it at the greatest distance from a realist

¹⁴⁵ Bersani, Leo. *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature*, first edition. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), p. 52. Bersani draws attention to moments of desire in James—like the letter from Milly Theale in *Wings of the Dove* which is unread, or the marriage of Maggie in *The Golden Bowl* which is inassimilable to “any map of social structures”—to emphasize ways that James “escape[s] from ... the literary form of which he was one of the greatest practitioners” (*A Future for Astyanax*, p. 82). For Bersani, James can only accommodate the ambiguities and opacities of disruptive desire by “designating their triumph in a region inaccessible to fiction” (*A Future for Astyanax*, p. 83).

tradition deeply invested in ethical thought. Insofar as nineteenth-century realism, particularly as practiced by novelists like George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, was a literary tradition partisan with and reflective about ethical norms, it is worth wondering how the ethical value of Jamesian literature has come to be associated with its distance from nineteenth-century realist practice.

Even Martha Nussbaum's Aristotelian approach to literature has presented James's fiction in a way that aligns it with what we might view as its anti-realist tendencies toward impulsiveness, indeterminacy, and particularity, rather than its realist tendencies toward analysis, understanding, and abstraction. For Nussbaum, James's fiction contributes to the moral life of readers by emphasizing "the complexity, the indeterminacy, the sheer *difficulty* of moral choice ...the refusal of life involved in fixing everything in advance according to some system of inviolable rules."¹⁴⁶ By emphasizing values like "complexity," "indeterminacy," and "difficulty," rather than clarity, signification, and resolution, Nussbaum's account of James portrays his work less as offering a realist interpretation of experience's significance, than as eliciting a modernist collage of experience's ambiguities. Is the wealth of ethical thought in nineteenth-century literature and philosophy doomed to remain a matter of indifference for current ethical approaches to Henry James in particular, and to literary study in general?

If realist impulses to analysis, systematization, and judgment are an important part of the ethical reflection that literature can facilitate, critics of the ethical turn have yet to theorize the full import of these tendencies for ethical readers. As a supplement to predominant characterizations of literary value within the ethical turn, the primary

¹⁴⁶ Nussbaum, Martha. Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 141–42, emphasis in original.

impulse I want to explore in *The Ambassadors* is a Hegelian impulse to holistic understanding: an impulse which begins from the axiom that an informed judgment of a perspective depends on perceiving its fit with others, or its placement within the whole.¹⁴⁷ More than merely advancing an understanding of Jamesian narrative that places it squarely within traditions of nineteenth-century realism and philosophy, I want to suggest that it is precisely due to the fact that Jamesian narrative is an ordered and structured whole, and just in spite of that fact, that it can have some of its most significant effects on the ethical judgments of readers.

To make a case that the shaping, selecting, and systematizing aspects of Jamesian narrative have ethical effects which have been overlooked by contributors to the ethical turn, I focus on James's distinctive use of the character-system in *The Ambassadors*, which employs the rhetorical techniques of vivification and ironization.

III. Vivification and Ironization in *The Ambassadors*

The concepts of vivification and ironization I describe in chapter 1 are implicit in existing criticism of *The Ambassadors*. Critics have long recognized the vivifying element of Lambert Strether's relation to Mrs. Newsome. As Ross Posnock has shown, Strether's "unrestrained receptivity and curiosity," facilitates a "process of diffusion, an

¹⁴⁷ "The truth is the whole" is an oft-quoted statement from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 11, §20. Even while following the dominant characterizations of ethics in Jamesian fiction as a "felt encounter with alterity" (Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," p. 899) or as an elaboration of ethical "ambiguities" and "interpretive problems," (Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, p. 157) both Dorothy Hale and Robert Pippin have also touched on more Hegelian ethical tendencies of James's fiction. This paper's emphasis on judgment and reflection in James has some echo in Hale's view of fiction as "restriction," or "self-binding," and in Pippin's suggestion that James depicts moral life within "a structure or network of commitments and inferences shared by others" ("Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel." *Narrative* 15.2 [2007], 195; *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, p. 6). Also, although Sharon Cameron's work on James is not designed to consider its ethical implications, her memorable characterization of consciousness in James's fiction as radically "intersubjective or relational" also coheres in part with the Hegelian view of Jamesian narrative I advance here (Cameron, Sharon. *Thinking in Henry James*. [Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991], p. 63).

opening to otherness” antithetical to Mrs. Newsome’s administrative efficiency.¹⁴⁸ For Posnock, Strether’s opposition to Mrs. Newsome is essential to the symbolic architecture of the novel: Mrs. Newsome’s “cold thought,” and “moral pressure” embody a sterility that places Strether’s comparative fecundity into clearer relief.¹⁴⁹ While most critical readings cohere with the generalization that Strether’s relationship to Mrs. Newsome is a vivifying one, critical accounts are more divided regarding the significance of Strether’s relationship to Chad.¹⁵⁰ Philip Weinstein’s analysis deftly elucidates reasons for this division. On the one hand, Chad’s practice of “intimacy and experience,” particularly with Madame de Vionnet, ironizes the life of imagination by foregrounding Strether’s comparative failure to “live.”¹⁵¹ But on the other hand, insofar as Chad’s practice of living depends upon insensitivity and self-absorption, juxtaposition between Chad and Strether also vivifies Strether’s point of view. Weinstein persuasively makes the case that Chad’s comparative hardness and self-possession provide contrasting emphasis to the life the novel cherishes most: the life of intensity, appreciation, responsiveness, and imagination.

Thus, existing criticism implicitly recognizes the dialectical significance of Strether’s relations to Mrs. Newsome (vivifying) and Chad (vivifying and ironizing).

However, the case for seeing *The Ambassadors* in dialectical terms is perhaps most

¹⁴⁸ Posnock, Ross. The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 228, 224.

¹⁴⁹ James, Henry. The Ambassadors, second edition, ed. S P. Rosenbaum. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 298, 278.

¹⁵⁰ Martha Nussbaum’s account of Strether’s relation to Mrs. Newsome offers an interesting exception to the critical trend that sees Mrs. Newsome as simply a vivifying foil. For Nussbaum, “it is because Mrs. Newsome is no mere caricature, but a brilliantly comic rendering of some of the deepest and most appealing features of Kantian morality, that the novel has the balance and power that it does” (Love’s Knowledge, p. 179).

¹⁵¹ Weinstein, Philip M. Henry James and the Requirements of the Imagination, first edition, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 153.

effectively revealed through a relationship in the novel critics have largely misunderstood.¹⁵² Unlike both Chad's and Mrs. Newsome's practices in this respect, Maria Gostrey's practice does not just clarify a dialectical contrast with Strether's imagination; it also expresses values associated with dialectical thought. In the preface, James suggests that the novel's central subject will be Strether, the man of "imagination galore" (*The Ambassadors*, p. 3); but he also suggests that the novel will offer a "drama of discrimination" (*The Ambassadors*, p. 7). My argument finds it most useful to think of Strether as demonstrating the novel's practice of imagination and Gostrey as

¹⁵² In order for Maria to aid the reader in understanding the novel's treatment of Strether, it's crucial that she be understood as opposing, rather than just enabling, Strether's imaginative flights. To put this point in the language of James's preface, to serve as a "ficelle" for the reader, Maria's practice must be emphasized on its own terms; Maria needs to achieve "something of the dignity of a prime idea" herself to facilitate the reader's accurate evaluation of Strether's practice (Henry James, "Preface to the New York Edition" [1909], in *The Ambassadors*, p. 13).

Despite the preface's suggestion that Maria represents a distinct idea crucial to *The Ambassadors's* construction, most critics who account for Gostrey's function in the novel do not view it as opposed to Strether's; on the predominant view, Gostrey's practice either enables Strether's or is equivalent to it. See F.O. Matthiessen: "[Maria] exists only as a confidante for Strether, only as a means of letting him comment on his experience" (*Henry James: The Major Phase*. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1944], p. 38). Sallie Sears: "Miss Gostrey's 'concept of 'personal types' becomes the keynote of Europe for Strether, part of whose growth of experience consists in his increasing ability to recognize them" (*The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James*. [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968], 111-112). Laurence Holland: "Miss Gostrey opens up 'freedom' for Strether, the expensive service she has begun to perform by freeing him from the past" (*The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James*. [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964], p. 257). R.P. Hoople: "It is through Maria that Strether awakens to type and by implication to typology" ("Iconological Characterization in James's *The Ambassadors*." *American Literature*, 60.3 [1988], 424). Millicent Bell: "Maria ...become[s] ...representative of Strether's new life" (*Meaning in Henry James*. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993], 329, 330). Maud Ellman: "James polarizes the rigid Mrs. Newsome to the morally flexible Miss Gostrey ...Strether undergoes an analysis in Paris, with Miss Gostrey acting as his primary analyst." (*The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud*, first edition, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 47, 60).

Walsh's 1987 article—titled from a statement Maria makes to Strether ('Things must have a basis')—offers the nearest precedent to my reading of the significance of Maria's vision. However, instead of conflating Maria's practice with Strether's, as most critics do, I view Walsh as conflating Strether's with Maria's. Walsh reads Strether as coming to demonstrate the same epistemic maturity as Maria without acknowledging the blind spots to which Strether's opposed form of vision lends itself. See Walsh, K. "'Things Must Have a Basis': Verification in *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*." *South Atlantic Review* 52.2 (1987), 51–64. The critical view of Strether's and Maria's relationship that comes closest to matching the one I lay out here is that advanced by Barbara DeMille, who views Maria's "seductive, ...confining 'selected' aesthetic categories" as obscuring Strether's receptivity to "differentiation, variation, uncertainty, and flux" ("Lambert Strether and the Tiger: Categories, Surfaces, and Forms in Nietzsche and Henry James." *South Atlantic Review* 51.1 (1986), 77).

demonstrating the practice of discrimination.¹⁵³ The novel's depiction of Strether and Gostrey is dialectical insofar as it suggests that the determinate practice necessary to achieve Strether's goals (novelty, surprise, pleasure) forecloses the achievement of Gostrey's goals (accuracy, explanation, communication). By building dialectical oppositions between perspectives like this into his fiction, James leads readers to a more self-conscious understanding of the values which his subjects express. Analyzing the way *The Ambassadors* opposes these perspectives in greater detail places us in a better position to understand a distinctive ethical effect James's fiction is designed to produce.

IV. Maria Gostrey's Discrimination

Critics are often tempted to view Maria's function in the novel as complementary to Strether's since their relation as characters is both friendly and pedagogical.¹⁵⁴ However, the novel invites a sharper opposition between the values that motivate Strether and Maria's behavior than the harmonious tone of their intercourse would suggest. Strether senses the opposed force of Maria's taxonomic categorizations from the moment he feels her eyes upon him:

They had taken hold of him straightway measuring him up and down as if they knew how; as if he were human material they had already in some sort handled. Their possessor was in truth, it may be communicated, the mistress of a hundred cases or categories, receptacles of the mind, subdivisions for convenience, in which, from a full experience, she pigeon-holed her fellow mortals with a hand as free as that of a compositor scattering type. She was as equipped in this particular as Strether was the reverse, and it made an opposition between them which

¹⁵³ My choice to affiliate Gostrey with discrimination goes against the grain of James's intentions insofar as James's preface affiliates Strether with discrimination and not Gostrey. The term fits Strether insofar as his imagination, freed from Maria's types and categories, is even more susceptible to nuances in experience; indeed, Strether attends to differences in feeling that other characters might easily neglect. However, James's choice to associate discrimination with Strether is misleading insofar as the word implies the achievement of accurate judgment. This paper's treatment of Miss Gostrey emphasizes that informed judgment does not just require the susceptibility to differences as such, but a sense of how differences fit within a broader structure.

¹⁵⁴ See note 16 for a summary of criticism on Maria Gostrey.

he might well have shrunk from submitting to if he had fully suspected it.
(*The Ambassadors*, p. 21)

Although the passage begins situated to Strether, James's narrator steps in to emphasize significant aspects of Maria that Strether has not yet sensed ("Their possessor was in truth ..."). The narrator notes a fundamental "opposition" between Miss Gostrey's and Strether's practice of perception, which Strether "might well have shrunk from submitting to if he had fully suspected it." While Gostrey's categorizations cause Strether to feel "pigeon-holed," they are also presented as an object of admiration: Miss Gostrey's facility in judging people implies that she is "equipped" in a way that Strether—who possesses Gostrey's equipment exactly "in reverse"—is not.

The ironizing effect that Maria's categorizations have on Strether's imagination is easily obscured by the fact that Strether's consciousness is the only one to which the narration offers access. However, Maria's perspective is often close at hand, making itself felt in skeptical questions and qualifications that pull the reader back from absorption into Strether's imaginative flights. During an early conversation, when Strether asserts the blunt conclusion that Chad is "a wretched boy," Gostrey's response presses him to employ more of the fine-grained categories readily available to her: "Of what type and temper is he?" she asks (45). The question suggests that, from Maria's perspective, Strether's feeling towards Chad is imprecise insofar as it lacks categories capable of fitting its object of investigation. Maria's distrust of Strether's vision remains as Strether's judgment changes to equally imprecise affirmation. Soon after, Strether gives "reign to his fancy," becoming swept away by Chad's transformation—by his "changed state, his lovely home, his beautiful things, his easy talk, his very appetite" (104). In Strether's mind, this hodge-podge of perceptions all resonate as "the notes of

[Chad's] freedom" (104). However, when Strether raises the "miracle" of Chad's alteration to Miss Gostrey, she counsels him to temper his judgment: "Don't make up your mind. There are all sorts of things. You haven't seen him all ...He's not so good as you think!" (105, 108). Because Miss Gostrey withholds judgment until she has the data necessary to place Chad in her array of categories, Gostrey's eventual conclusion carries more weight than Strether's provisional speculations.

Miss Gostrey not only encourages Strether to employ more discriminating categories in his perceptions of others, but she also presses him to consider the implications that one category might entail for another. Miss Gostrey's attentiveness to the way that perceptions invite or preclude others allows her to intuit the truth of Chad and Marie's relationship. Chad's newfound urbanity is not an isolated perception for Gostrey, existing on its own terms; rather, it is a signal that invites or excludes other possibilities. In this case, Chad's behavior indicates the presence of a woman in his life: ("A woman. ...It's one of the things that *have* to be ...don't you see ...how she accounts for him?" [107]). And if Chad is involved in a sexual relationship with a married woman, that in turn would necessarily qualify what Strether would understand as his 'goodness' (thus, Maria's warning: "He's not so good as you think!" [108]).

The "acuteness" and "quick imagination" Strether demonstrates in this conversation allow him to proffer multiple explanations for the significance of Chad's change (107). However, such creativity does not help Strether to equitably consider the relation of these new possibilities to each other. Despite Maria's "warning," Strether finds himself unwilling to acknowledge observations that might qualify or refine his dramatic new perceptions. This new version of Chad "elbow[s] out of Strether's

consciousness everything but itself" (108). Because Strether does not integrate his new perceptions of Chad with other relevant perceptions, his judgment is prone to sudden and arbitrary shifts, such as the moment he revises his morally-laden view of Chad's irresponsible affair: "it seemed somehow as if [Chad] couldn't *but* be as good from the moment he wasn't as bad" (108, emphasis in original). Although it's exciting for Strether to have exchanged his previous conventional wisdom for a new view of Chad, passages like these suggest Strether's new view is not necessarily more accurate than the old. Strether's caprice manifests in his rapidly shifting judgments: either Chad is a gentleman or a pagan, either his attachment is virtuous or base, either he is free or he is entangled, and so on.

If Strether's provisional speculations are vulnerable to dramatic oscillation, they are also easily hijacked by subjective interest. Multiple passages speak to the motivated nature of Strether's thought process: "He *wanted to be able to like his specimen with a clear good conscience...*"; "Strether *found a certain freedom* on his own side in defining it..."; "This description ...*had a sound that gratified his mental ear...*"; "Occupied with another side of the matter ... [*he took*] *refuge verily in that side*" (83, 97, 99, 345, emphasis mine). Such passages emphasize Strether's tendency to endorse judgments that are convenient, interesting, or novel as opposed to endorsing judgments that cohere within a broader explanatory framework. The gentle satire of Strether's observation throughout the novel, performed both by Maria's questioning presence, and by the free-indirect narration, reveals that Strether does not judge disinterestedly. Rather, Strether uses judgment to clear his conscience, to feel liberated, to gratify his aesthetic sensibilities, and to protect himself from unpleasant conclusions.

The “opposition” Strether feels in Maria’s eyes does not just arise from Strether’s discomfort in feeling “placed” within Maria’s array of human types, then, but from Strether’s sense that his vision fails to measure up to her standards. When Strether finally discovers that Chad and Marie’s relationship is not ‘virtuous’ as he previously thought, he anticipates the subjection to Maria’s exacting standards that tends to occur in their discussions: “He foresaw that Miss Gostrey would come again into requisition on the morrow ...it wasn’t to be denied that he was already a little afraid of her ‘What on earth ...had you then supposed?’” (315). Strether’s fears are confirmed in the ensuing meeting when Maria draws attention to Strether’s almost willfully inattentive belief in the ‘virtue’ of Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship:

“What I see, what I saw,” Maria returned, “is that you dressed up even the virtue. You were wonderful—you were beautiful, as I’ve had the honour of telling you before; but, if you wish really to know,” she sadly confessed, “I never quite knew *where* you were. There were moments,” she explained, “when you struck me as grandly cynical; there were others when you struck me as grandly vague.”

Her friend considered. “I had phases. I had flights.”

“Yes, but things must have a basis.” (332)

Maria does not hesitate to serve the “requisition” that Strether has been dreading. She accuses him of having “dressed up” the nature of Chad and Marie’s relationship by willfully assuming its non-sexual nature. In response, Strether accurately describes his propensity for “phases” and “flights,” for intuitive leaps and creative speculations—a capacity that positively distinguishes him in Gostrey’s eyes. However, if Strether’s speculations are “wonderful” and “beautiful,” they are also “grandly vague” to Gostrey: unconstrained, imbalanced by consideration of their relation to other perceptions that Strether has bracketed or ignored. In contrast to Maria’s habit of proceeding “as always, for clearness” Strether’s examination of the intentions of others is routinely arrested and

incomplete (296). (“You’ve got no facts at all?” Maria asks, incredulous, after Strether’s first visit to Chad in Paris. “Well, he has a lovely home,” Strether responds [81]).

Whereas Strether’s unhinged speculations attend to the imaginative possibilities his perceptions afford, Maria’s discrimination adheres to a conflicting imperative that “things must have a basis” (332). It is thus not just Mrs. Newsome, with her “cold thought,” but also Miss Gostrey, “with all her science,” whose sober and disinterested perception of the social world opposes Strether’s motivated perception (298, 90). Attending to inaccuracies of Strether’s perception allows us to see why Maria views herself as Strether’s pedagogue, guiding Strether in his perceptions until he can “toddle alone” (192). A tolerant but exacting pedagogue in the style of Matthew Arnold, Maria nudges Strether away from an subjective absorption in aesthetic experience to impersonal assessment of its implications.

V. Lambert Strether’s Imagination

Thus far, the paper has only accounted for the ironizing dimension of Gostrey’s relation to Strether; it has described Strether’s imaginative vision from the outside, from the perspective of Maria’s discrimination. But understanding the novel’s depiction of the dialectical opposition between the two requires attention to the way that Strether’s imaginative practice is not just ironized, but vivified, by its opposition to Maria’s discrimination.

In truth, it is precisely when the novel reveals Strether’s failing to pursue Maria’s injunction to uncover the “basis” of his perceptions that the novel also communicates their value. An early conversation with Chad about his relationship to Marie de Vionnet reveals the double-sided nature of Strether’s vision. Chad explains to Strether that his

“hitch” in leaving Europe is his mistress, who is “too good a friend” (142). Strether’s response, “It *will* be a sacrifice, then?”—prompts Chad to remark that leaving her “will be the greatest loss [he has] ever suffered” (142). Strether takes Chad at the depth of his word, here; he does not consider whether accepting a view of Chad in this light of tragic romance has the “basis” in the facts that Maria requires. In fact, Chad will turn out to be quite capable of abandoning Madame de Vionnet at the novel’s conclusion—Chad’s description of her as a “good ... friend” may even provide Strether with a hint that his romantic ardor is cooling (142). As is typical, though, Strether ignores perceptions that conflict with the interpretation he prefers. Having attended to the evidence that supports his expectations, he concludes that the “mystery” of Chad’s relation to Marie has been “clear[ed] up” (142). Insofar as this scene is constructed to reveal distance between Strether’s naïve understanding of Chad’s relationship with Marie and their actual relationship, it presents Strether’s perspective in a critical light.

But while the scene invites judgment of Strether’s view of Chad and Marie, it would be a mistake to overlook the extent to which the scene also invites appreciation of that view. As Strether imagines Chad afflicted by the loss of Marie de Vionnet, the moment takes on an “intensity” for Strether; it becomes “flagrantly and publicly—interesting” (142). The narrator’s attentiveness to Strether’s enthusiasm and curiosity moves readers’ attention away from external factual errors toward internal imaginative possibilities. Naiveté about the motivations of others appears a small price to pay for Strether’s perspective toward relationships: a belief that they invite elevating transformation, that they require profound “sacrifice,” and that they are upheld by “word[s] of honour” (142, 143). No less than Cervantes, the author of *The Ambassadors*

acutely perceives the limitations of the ethos his protagonist expresses. But of course, readers of both authors are still capable of perceiving the affection that these novels solicit for their protagonists who each possess a capacity to imagine human interaction in a world of beauty, nobility, and intensity. Strether's "suppositions and divinations"—"exciting," "sudden," and "odd"—are their own justification (319). Strether's perceptions do not require the basis in facts prized by Maria; they need "no warrant but their intensity" (319).

If Maria's skeptical statements and questions invite ironizing attention to Strether's imagination, Strether's internal monologues also invite ironizing attention to Maria's discrimination. Narration situated to Strether describes the kind of explanation Maria practices in slanted terms in order to communicate the costs that such analysis has from his perspective:

His heart always sank when the clouds of explanation gathered. His highest ingenuity was in keeping the sky of life clear of them. Whether or no he had a grand idea of the lucid, he held that nothing ever was in fact—for any one else—explained. One went through the vain motions, but it was mostly a waste of life. ...A personal relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly understood or, better still, didn't care if they didn't. From the moment they cared if they didn't it was living by the sweat of one's brow. (92)

In this passage, "explanation" is explicitly described as "vain," and as "a waste"; and it is connected both to "sweat" and to "clouds." The metaphoric association of explanation with "clouds" positions it as an emotional disturbance ("his heart always sank"), while

the rhetoric explicitly celebrates the strategies Strether uses to avoid it (this is “his highest ingenuity”). From Strether’s perspective, explanation is not just an emotional burden, but a fruitless epistemic endeavor: “he held that nothing ever was in fact ...explained.” The feelings that guide Strether’s “personal relation[s]” are simply too nuanced and idiosyncratic to be easily simplified into understandable communications. From Strether’s perspective, Miss Gostrey’s competing ideal of discrimination, with its interest in analysis and categorization, can only appear as a block and a weight. Maria’s habit of aiming “as always, for clearness,” is just what would invite the explanatory clouds that obscure Strether’s alternative ideal (296). Being forced to explain oneself and others, or to fit people into convenient “categories, receptacles of the mind,” does not allow for the free play of feeling Strether cherishes (21). Instead of inviting unconstrained personal relations, where people either understand each other perfectly or don’t care if they don’t, Maria’s discrimination involves detailed analysis of the motives of others. From Strether’s perspective, both the “cold thought” of Mrs. Newsome and the “science” of Miss Gostrey can only appear as obstructions, as “clouds” obscuring the imaginative practice that the rhetoric works to illuminate. Critics have used passages like these to draw attention to the way in which the novel depicts Strether as purposefully neglecting ideals of selection, system, and explanation in order to enact his own ideals.¹⁵⁵ That the presence of this tension between values has been noted by multiple readers of *The*

¹⁵⁵ McWhirter, Posnock, DeMille, and Hutchinson have all described Strether’s practice in terms that clarify the values it must relinquish in order to preserve the values that define it. While none of these critics focus explicitly on Maria’s vision as a dialectical foil to Strether’s, their analyses do suggest that Strether purposefully neglects ideals of selection, system, and explanation in order to enact his own ideals. See McWhirter, David. *Desire and Love in Henry James: A Study of the Late Novels*, first edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 65; Posnock, Ross. *The Trial of Curiosity*, p. 228; DeMille, Barbara. “Lambert Strether and the Tiger,” p. 77; and Hutchison, Hazel. *Seeing and Believing: Henry James and the Spiritual World*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 102.

Ambassadors should be no surprise if we suspect that James uses the novel's character-system in a Hegelian way, to communicate information about the fit between mutually antithetical value schemas.

Turning to the novel's final conversation between Strether and Gostrey gives us a chance to consider the novel's closing emphasis on the irreconcilable tension between Strether and Gostrey's views. In the novel's final scene Maria makes an offer to Strether that he rejects. Why Strether makes this decision is not immediately intuitive; a woman whom he finds attractive makes him an offer and the novel ends with Strether refusing it. The ambiguity of this scene, however, is importantly different from those ambiguities noted by critics like Butler, Newton, and Bersani. Strether's decision is not puzzling because the narrative pulls back from Strether and refuses to allow readers to see his justification for making the decision, but from something like the opposite: by attending to Strether's analysis of these decisions in such detail, the narrative ends up offering multiple and conflicting explanations for his choice. Rather than stepping back from a realist commitment to analyzing and judging behavior, the final scene of Strether's conversation with Maria reveals analysis and judgment at a high degree of intensity.

Before we begin to pry apart some of the various competing values that inform Strether's final decision, a review of the context in which he makes this decision is in order. By the time of Strether's final conversation with Maria, his ambassadorial mission for Mrs. Newsome, his fiancé, is apparently complete: her son, Chad will be returning home from Europe to take on his responsibilities and run the family business. But Strether has admitted that he is now "different" for Mrs. Newsome, and that now he "see[s]" her in a way he previously did not (345). Maria's ensuing question "What then

do you go home to?” thus wonders if returning makes sense given Strether’s changed state and, in particular, all that she and Strether have experienced together in Europe (345). Strether intuits this to be an “offer” from Maria, who tells Strether soon after that there is “nothing ...in the world” she wouldn’t do for him (346).

Why does Strether refuse Maria’s offer if he admits that things are over with Mrs. Newsome? According to the interpretation advanced by most critics, Strether assumes that Maria’s offer comprises a relationship with her, and the key moment of Strether’s rationale is the assertion that receiving Maria for his ambassadorial efforts would make him “wrong” (347).¹⁵⁶ To have gone to Europe at the behest of Mrs. Newsome and to have found a different love interest does not match up with Strether’s hope “not ...to have got anything for myself” out of his mission (346). According to Strether’s idealistic logic, accepting a relationship with Maria would entail that he had used Mrs. Newsome for his own purposes, akin to the way that Chad uses and then abandons Madame de Vionnet. This self-abnegating aspect of Strether’s rationale for refusing Maria is supported by the dialectical contrast the novel develops between Strether’s idealistic approach to relationships and Chad Newsome’s more pragmatic approach.¹⁵⁷ Strether’s final decision effectively reveals trade-offs between these two perspectives: refusing Maria expresses values associated with Strether’s imagination like generosity, sensitivity, and reflectiveness at the expense of expressing values associated with Chad’s urbanity

¹⁵⁶ Fessenbecker and Pippin offer slightly different accounts of Strether’s reasons for rejecting Maria’s offer than the predominant critical view. Fessenbecker views Strether’s decision as involving a conflict between ethics and happiness which is made arbitrary by the absence of a sense of selfhood stable enough to ground either choice (“Freedom, Self-Obligation, and Selfhood in Henry James.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 66.1 [2011], 92). And Pippin suggests that Strether’s refusal expresses a scrupulous concern that his evaluations of Chad’s experience in Europe appear disinterested both to himself and others, rather than tainted by self-justification (*Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, 166-68).

¹⁵⁷ For an analysis that associates Strether’s decision with a refusal of values associated with Chad, see Weinstein, *Henry James and the Requirements of the Imagination*, 158, 152-54.

like self-possession, hardness, and experience (Weinstein, *Henry James and the Requirements of the Imagination*, 152-54). Read in this way, Strether's refusal of Maria's offer is a rejection of the practice of Chad's approach to intimacy: an approach which enables one to "live" with an array of rich experiences, but at the cost of foregoing the depths and nuances of Strether's imaginative engagements with others (132).

While Strether's final decision can be read as clarifying a dialectical opposition between Strether and Chad's perspectives, then, it is also possible to read that decision as clarifying a dialectical opposition between Strether and Maria's perspectives. On this reading, not logically incompatible with the first, Strether's refusal of Maria's "offer" is not just a refusal of Maria the woman, but a refusal of Maria's perspective of discrimination. Strether interprets Maria's final "offer" as one "of exquisite service, of lightened care"—as one "that might well have tempted" (346). But to the extent that Strether associates this offer with Maria's discrimination, (rather than with Maria herself), this offer would not just appear comforting, but stifling. By protecting Strether from the errors of idiosyncrasy and offering the promise of shared understanding, Maria's discrimination comes at the expense of insulating Strether from the imaginative ideal he seeks: "[Maria's offer] built him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested, all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty and knowledge. It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things; yet, none the less, so far as they made his opportunity they made it only for a moment" (346). Strether views Maria's offer as a live opportunity "only for a moment" before dismissing it. For Maria's principle of "selection"—her attendance only to those perceptions that fit within a coherent whole—compromises the opposed standard of Strether's vision. Strether does

not prize “knowledge,” if it comes at the cost of unfettered expansion; he cannot prize “beauty” if it comes at the cost of sublimity.

If Strether has enough confidence in his own ideal to entertain Maria’s offer “only for a moment,” he nevertheless recognizes that her ideal of discrimination confronts his own imaginative ideal with limitations. The judicious and attentive discrimination that allows Maria to understand and appreciate Strether’s perspective also enacts a competing standard to it. As we have seen, the opposition between the two is indicated from the moment Strether feels Maria’s eyes upon him and is further manifested in Maria’s responses. Maria speaks to Strether as one “who could afford a concession,” and she describes herself as a parent instructing a child how to “toddle alone” (223, 192). Indeed, Strether feels childish in deciding to reject her. Although Strether resolves to maintain his own standard, his decision is compatible with finding it “awkward” and “almost stupid” not to prize Maria’s as well (346). As Strether’s commitments have been tested through juxtaposition against competing commitments expressed within the novel’s character-system, he has become aware of their limitations. By perceiving the relation of Maria’s perspective to his own, Strether has clarified the values he must give up to express his imaginative ideal. To the extent that Strether’s unbounded “phases” and “flights” dispense with Maria’s “selection,” they must come at the cost of “knowledge” and “beauty” (332, 346). By allowing readers to follow Strether’s increasingly self-conscious assessment of relations between values in this way, *The Ambassadors* informs ethical judgments of readers by promoting a Hegelian understanding of relations between antithetical perspectives.

VI. Conclusion

If this examination of ironization and vivification in *The Ambassadors* has been successful, existing theorizations of James's significance to the ethical turn deserve reconsideration. I began by summarizing what ethical critics have rightly observed about Jamesian narrative: the way in which it often invites suspension of judgment, either by pulling back entirely from the realist interpretation of character or by attending to ways that particular situations render ethical judgment out of place or indeterminate. This analysis has suggested, though, that dialectical oppositions within *The Ambassadors'* character-system do not just suspend judgment but provide context that directs and shapes judgment.

Rather than presenting fictional characters with a Levinasian immediacy of contact which refuses conceptual understanding, James's narrative has instead presented both Maria and Strether in an intelligible way that makes it possible to extract meaning from their actions. The basis of this extraction has been the narrative's scrupulous articulation of the values that govern their behavior: observations like Maria's statement that "things must have a basis" or characterizations of Strether's "phases," "flights," and "sudden gusts of fancy" convey distinctive ethos associated with each character to readers (332, 319). The novel also facilitates ethical thinking about these values through enactment, by constructing a narrative in which these abstract commitments are expressed through the concrete actions and speech of the characters: for instance, through Maria's astute speculation that there is a woman in Chad's life or through Strether's initial wonder at Chad's transformation. By making connections like these between the articulation and enactment the narrative provides information relevant to practical judgment. By observing such connections, an interested reader might learn something

about values associated with these perspectives: for instance, that a discriminating approach may help a person intuit the motivations of others, or that an imaginative approach may use others as a basis for vivid internal journeys.

In addition to developing Aristotelian *phronesis* by considering relations between value schemas and situations, we have seen here that *The Ambassadors* also promotes Hegelian self-consciousness by inviting readers to consider relations of value schemas to one another. To consider both the vivification and ironization of Strether's perspective is to be moved from narrowly dismissive or overly indulgent views of Strether's imagination toward a more holistic view that locates Strether's expressive practice in relation to relevant alternatives. By constructing dialectical oppositions to characters like Maria Gostrey and Chad Newsome, the character system of *The Ambassadors* does not promote indeterminate emotional knowledge that is beyond reason; it would be more precise to say that it does the reverse—that it subjects emotional knowledge to reason by facilitating systematic comparison necessary to locate subjective perspectives in a broader context. Perhaps *The Ambassadors* has puzzled ethical critics in part because the novel's formal structure conflicts with its thematic content. If I've shown that the novel's character-system exhibits the many-sided judgment of mid-century Victorian liberalism, I've also suggested that novel's central character exhibits the imaginative intensities of late Victorian aestheticism. No less than the ethical modes of Maria's liberal discrimination and Strether's aestheticist imagination, the artistic styles of expressive realism and the late Victorian aestheticism are antitheses. While the progress of literary

history allowed for competing currents, it would eventually lean towards the modernist successors of aestheticism and to the decline of expressive realism.¹⁵⁸

To this point, Hegelian contributions to the ethical turn have been relatively few, and the major contributors have been philosophers rather than literary critics.¹⁵⁹ And although Mikhail Bakhtin and Richard Rorty have affiliated the ethical value of novels with their juxtaposition of antithetical vocabularies of value, neither has offered substantive analysis of how novels actually facilitate such juxtaposition, or of the kind of novels, if any, that do this more effectively than others.¹⁶⁰ While this book's identification of ironization and vivification in Victorian novels is a step in the direction

¹⁵⁸ First of all, congratulations if you made it to this footnote. I'm taking this opportunity to note that Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is not a modernist text by the standards I employed in that last sentence. Does this mean that I've arbitrarily expanded the expressive realist aesthetic to encompass all the novels I love the most? Difficult to say.

¹⁵⁹ Despite describing the ethical turn as constituted predominantly by "neo-Aristotelian moral philosophers and Levinasian poststructuralists," Fessenbecker has also cited the philosophers Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor as key figures in a less prominent Hegelian strand of the ethical turn ("In Defense of Paraphrase," p. 119). Robert Pippin's *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* could also be mentioned as a contributor to this Hegelian direction in the ethical turn. Although Pippin's *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* engages substantively with James's novels, Pippin's reading of *The Ambassadors*, for instance, does not analyze the ethical implications of dialectical relations between characters but the way in which Strether enacts a meta-ethical sensibility expressed by all of James's fiction—a sensibility that assumes right action in modernity depends upon its capacity to be recognizable in Hegel's sense of the term [*Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, p. 6]).

¹⁶⁰ In "Discourse and the Novel" Bakhtin describes the novel's capacity to depict "specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" which may be juxtaposed against each other in contradictory, supplementary, or dialogical ways (Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. ed. Michael Holquist. Trans Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981 (1935)], 291-2). However, Bakhtin does not offer an examples from specific novels to clarify how these various juxtapositions work. Although Bakhtin does discuss passages from *Eugene Onegin* in "The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Bakhtin's analysis of the way that Lensky's poetic language is dialogized through placement in Pushkin's novel is arguably insufficient to clarify the ethical ramifications of juxtaposing contradictory world views. See "The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 43-49.

Richard Rorty has suggested that novels and works of philosophy help readers shape and expand their own vocabularies of value in a loosely dialectical way. See especially *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 80, in which Rorty discusses the possibility that literary works can facilitate the "redescription" of ethical vocabularies. Rorty also offers a helpful footnote that provides some examples of the kinds of works that he thinks are useful for this purpose—see *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 143. However, like Bakhtin, Rorty does not analyze how a literary work could depict tensions between more than one vocabulary of value, nor does he specify what exactly it is about any particular work that makes it suitable for ethical redescription.

of such analysis, there is more work that could be done: antithetical value schemas play an essential role in many other literary traditions. A heightened attention to the dialectical elements of narrative is necessary if critics are to avoid missing a sophisticated practice of judgment essential to phenomenological and liberal traditions of reading.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

PhD in English. Johns Hopkins University, 2017 (expected)
Dissertation: *Many-Sided Lives: Opposing Values in Nineteenth-Century British Realism*
English Ph.D. candidate, University of Minnesota, 2008-2010
B.A. in English *summa cum laude*, University of Minnesota, 2008

Publications

"Expressive Realism and the Phenomenological Turn: A Canon for Postcritical Literary Studies." *Poetics Today* 39 (forthcoming).
"Liberal Evaluation in The Character-System of *Middlemarch*." *Studies in English Literature* 58.4 (forthcoming).
"Post-Critical Reading and the New Hegelianism." *Arcade: A Digital Salon*. Stanford Department of English, Mar. 2015. Web. <<http://arcade.stanford.edu/content/post-critical-reading-and-new-hegelianism>>.
"Henry James at the Ethical Turn: Vivification and Ironization in *The Ambassadors*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 69.3 (2014): 366-393.
"Incommensurable Worlds and 'Impossible Union': The Dialectical Form of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*." *Yeats Eliot Review*. 30.3/4 (2013): 27-45.

Invited Talks

"Reading with the Grain of Realism." *New Literary History Colloquium on Postcritical Interpretation*, Univ. of Virginia, November 2014.

Presentations

"Between Cynicism and Naiveté: Thinking the Value of Humanistic Education with the Realist Novel." *American Comparative Literature Association*, Harvard University (March 2016).
"*Mansfield Park* as Transformative Fiction." *Northeast Modern Language Association*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (April 2014).
"Political Legitimacy in Hegel's Reading of *Antigone*." *American Comparative Literature Association*, Vancouver, Canada (April 2011).
"Dostoevsky's Realism of the Human Soul." *Nineteenth-Century Subfield*, Univ. of Minnesota (September 2009).
"From Hegel to Whitman: German and American Idealism." *Transitions, Translations, and Transmission*, Univ. of South Carolina (April 2009).
"Norms of Reason: Plato, Aquinas, Rorty, and Habermas." *Wesleyan Philosophical Society*, Anderson University (March 2009).

Honors, Awards, and Professional Affiliations

Preparing Future Faculty Teaching Academy Fellow, Johns Hopkins University, 2015

Dean's Teaching Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University, 2013.

Owen Fellowship, Johns Hopkins English Department, 2010 – present

English PhD Fellowship, University of Minnesota, 2008 – 2010.

Teaching Interests

Primary

Victorian Literature

Expository Writing

Romanticism

Secondary

Literary Theory

Ethics and Literature

Theory of the Novel

Teaching Experience

Instructor:

“The Anti-hero: from Heathcliff to Walter White” (January 2016, Summer 2015)

Expository Writing: “Better than Human” (Spring 2015)

“Values and Gender in Nineteenth-century British Literature” (Fall 2014)

Expository Writing: “The Choice of Freedom” (Fall 2013, Spring 2014)

“Writing and Imagination” (Summer 2016)

Teaching Assistant:

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“Novels into Film” (Fall 2015).

“British Literature I” (Fall 2011).

“Literature of Public Life” (Fall 2010)

“Introduction to Modern Fiction” (Fall 2008, Spring 2009)

“Writing and Imagination” (Summer 2007-13)

Service

Graduate Representative Organization officer for English department (2014-15).

Student mentor at Paul's Place (2014-2016)

Tutored Southwest Baltimore middle-school student with learning disability.

Walk-in tutor at Franklin Learning Center (2008-2009)

Assisted adult immigrants with math and reading preparation for G.E.D.

Languages Read

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Referees

Christopher Nealon, Professor of English, Johns Hopkins University

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